

CAN WE AFFORD THE DOCTOR ?



MEMORIES OF HEALTH CARE

AN AGE EXCHANGE PUBLICATION

CAN WE AFFORD THE DOCTOR ?

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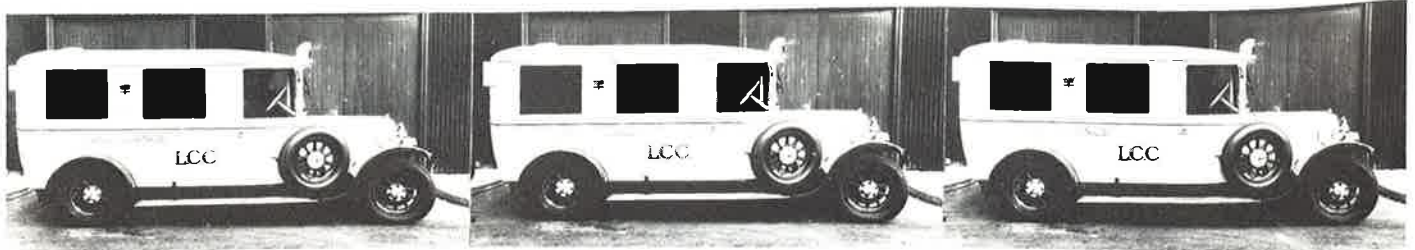
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"CAN WE AFFORD THE DOCTOR?" is published by Age Exchange to coincide with their theatre production of the same name. Written by Joyce Holliday, directed by Pam Schweitzer with musical direction by Sandra Kerr, the show is based on the recollections in this book.

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF DAPHNE SARGOOD,
THE FIRST FRIEND OF AGE EXCHANGE

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CHAPTERS

Childhood Living Conditions
 Visits To and From The Doctor
 Home Cures
 Home Cures From Abroad
 Insurance
 Infectious Diseases
 The Workhouse
 Hospital Treatment
 A Career In Nursing
 Midwifery
 Childbirth
 Fresh Air Treatments
 School Clinics
 The National Health Service

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"Can We Afford The Doctor?" is a look back to the days when medical care was considered a luxury and the need for it something to be dreaded. These interviews reveal the close relationship between bad housing conditions, unemployment and ill-health. Those whose environment put them at most risk were least protected when illness struck. Damp walls, overcrowded rooms, lack of money for nourishing food and warm clothes all contributed to the prevalence of chest complaints among the poor, and the rapid spread of infectious diseases.

Visits to the doctor were kept to a minimum because the cost was prohibitive, and wherever possible people relied on home remedies to ease most conditions. These remedies are often based on sound principles and readers will doubtless want to try a few of them out in these days of soaring prescription charges!

Even childbirth was handled at a local and amateur level within living memory. However, professional medical services were expanding throughout the lives of our contributors, in response to public demand intensified by two world wars. Many of the stories in this book are told from the point of view of the professional midwives, nurses and doctors involved in this expansion, culminating in the arrival of the National Health Service in 1948.

Child Health Clinic, Deptford

Many pensioners we spoke to recalled the importance in their lives of local initiatives taken by reforming philanthropists such as Rachel and Margaret McMillan who established the Deptford clinic and the open air schools and convalescent centres. Their prescriptions were good food, fresh air and proper washing facilities at little or no cost, and many lives were saved by these simple remedies which we might take for granted.

The recollections of older people on matters of health and social welfare before the National Health Service are most timely, reminding us as they do that the Welfare State was and remains a necessity which must be most stoutly defended now that it is coming under such pressure.

As with all other Age Exchange publications, the words come directly from a series of interviews with pensioners from across London, with a particular emphasis on South East London where the Age Exchange Theatre Company has its base. These interviews have been edited, arranged under headings for the ease of the reader, and illustrated with contemporary photographs from local archives and from the contributors themselves, into a lively and accessible collage. We hope you enjoy reading "Can We Afford The Doctor?" as much as we have enjoyed compiling it.



CHILDHOOD LIVING CONDITIONS

You lived in these little tiny houses back-to-back and very overcrowded, but you never lacked for help. I mean neighbours would pop in if you were ill. A neighbour would always come in and you could call out across the road to someone if you were in trouble and they would come in. But now people lie dead for a week before anyone finds out, don't they? And in those days old people lived with their families or close by. I mean my grandmother lived round the corner to us in a tiny, tiny cottage in Tanners Hill. There were three or four rows of tiny cottages raised up in the middle of Tanners Hill on a little island, really minute they were. My grandmother lived in there. We used to go round there. You couldn't get more than two or three people in the room and when her family all came they didn't all come at the same time. They couldn't all of them get in you know. They used to send the children outside because there wasn't room for them all and some would stand about, couldn't sit down. There were three or four uncles there and you all had to stand up or perch on something to talk. And we were sent outside to play on the cobbles because there was no traffic of course. You couldn't get there except by going up these steps and there were these little cobbled paths and these tiny tiny cottages.

We didn't have any bathrooms, no. I had to go down to the baths at New Cross or have a bath in front of the fire. Then my uncle built his own bathroom at the end of his garden. He built a shed there and he had a bath fitted in there. Cold water ran into it and you used to have to carry the hot water from the copper across the yard to the bathroom. But at least we had a bath in our house, well in my uncle's house, and we were allowed to use it.

The public baths were quite nice really they were perfectly clean. You took your own towel and we used to take our own soap. You used to go in and the attendant would turn on the taps, so that you couldn't have too

much water, they turned it off from outside and you had so long. It was always hot and perfectly clean and it was a way of getting a bath.

Environment plays an important part in the early history of an infant's rearing, and it is interesting to note that in '217 instances the parents were living in one room only, whilst in 452 instances the tenement consisted of only two rooms.

Should the Health Visitor find that a baby is ailing, and the parents in poor circumstances, the mother is advised to take the child to the Council's Central Clinic, which is open every morning.

Medical Officer of Health's report 1921

When your father was out of work it was mostly bread that you had, a lot of bread we ate and potatoes because they filled you up. But it wasn't sliced white bread like we have now, it isn't bread nowadays, it's polystyrene, isn't it?

It was crunchy loaves you know but we never had fresh bread. I think we always used to buy yesterday's bread because it was cheaper.

About 1930, Dad lost his job and the firm closed down and he couldn't get another job, and he tried, my God he tried. He used to walk miles. He used to get up about 5 o'clock in the morning to go out so that he'd be at the front of the queue to try and get a job and he'd do anything, but he still couldn't get a permanent job you know. And I noticed it particularly because mum used to give him sandwiches and he started off by having bacon sandwiches and he ended up eventually just taking bread





Providence Cottages Poplar 1930

and dripping because we had nothing else. We were really desperate. Mother would go without food sometimes.

When my dad came home she'd get him some corned beef and potatoes so that at least he would have something to keep him going and she'd pretend she'd had hers with us you know. And she'd glare at me so that I wouldn't say anything, but eventually Dad realised she wasn't eating and he wouldn't eat his unless she had some as well. We were in really desperate straits at times. She went out to work; she got a job housekeeping you know a couple of days a week and bringing in a few shillings.

Well I never had any new clothes until I was fourteen and I had a new coat for my grandmother's funeral. Before that we had everybody's hand-me-downs you know. We had to buy shoes because I had delicate ankles and I couldn't wear heavy clodhopper shoes so I had to have shoes bought for me, and Mum used to manage to do that but she used to pay off to the tally man, you know, get a cheque from the Co-op and pay it off weekly. Nobody minded that because almost everybody did it the same way anyway. You couldn't go out and buy six or seven pounds worth of clothes; it was unheard of. That's several weeks salary for a man wasn't it?

The thick yellow fog that we used to have, really thick yellow. You couldn't see your hand in front of you, literally. This was killing to anyone with chest trouble and I used to spend a lot of time in bed having steaming kettles and old fashioned remedies. I had very long, very black glossy hair and this old doctor told my mother once that the hair was taking all the strength from my body and I had to have it cut. So she took me straight round to the barbers and I had my hair cut really short. When I got home my father went nearly mad because he really loved this hair, and that's the sort of doctor he was, really old fashioned, and I would have thought totally useless really.

Nothing did any good. Penicillin nowadays would probably have cleared it up within a few months. Until I was eight, during the winter I was just layed up in bed all the time. I couldn't breathe with it, it was absolutely appalling.

People have a lot more space now, better food, the air is cleaner, and a lot of people have got central heating. It's very good that and we're in a cleaner environment. Well I suppose most of London is a clean air zone now isn't it, very little smoke. You can see the sky. Well you couldn't in London during the winter. You literally couldn't.

Dorothy Barton

We lived in one of those tiny little streets in Bermondsey. It's not there now, it was bombed during the war. It was half way between Nine Elms Lane and Wandsworth Road. In the house there were usually two families, one downstairs and we were upstairs. You'd have a front room, a bedroom at the back and a small kitchen with a range and in the back a scullery with a whacking great copper in the corner where every Monday you put all the clothes in and Christmas time you cooked your Christmas puddings in it. Then the toilet was out in the back yard. Freezing cold — you had to take out a candle out there at night — used to frighten the life out of me when I was young.

You'd use the same front door and there was a small passage, then you'd go up the stairs. There'd be the kitchen and little room at the back you called a scullery. Then you had a bedroom and a front room. There was running water which sometimes wasn't all that good — no hot taps. Everything was done with the kettle on the hob. In fact in my very early years we didn't even have gas. We had oil lamps. Gas light with the incandescent mantles was a good light — far better light than electric for the eyes.

My mother had 3 boys and 4 girls and downstairs was my old grandmother — she was Irish — her old man and her, a son, a stepson, and a daughter. That was all in one house. Sleeping must have been an awful business — most kids in those days left home early to get away from it. It was absolutely crammed — it must have smelt horrible. And we all had the bugs, fleas and goodness knows what else — all the walls were plaster and lath. When you're a child, it never registered. I wasn't even jealous of people who had plenty of money and big places. In fact, I used to read the books — the Magnet, the Gem — all about public school boys with plenty of money. I used to love reading about them. I wasn't a bit envious of them at all.

As far as I can remember the girls more or less pigged in with Mum and Dad. I think I can remember a curtain being put across the room to keep them apart.

had a bath or a wash for ages, they were looked down upon as the outcasts. And the school dinner place was in a kind of a little mission hall — a sort of a scruffy little place where they'd have soup — a kind of soup kitchen and we'd sooner go without a dinner than go there. Terrible days, wasn't they?

The kitchen sink was a flat looking sink and you had a cold tap and you just washed in cold water and you used Sunlight soap. I don't think we worried too much about washing down. I used to have quite a name for having a dirty neck and when they sent me away once to summer camp they made us take our shirt and vest off to have a wash — this had never been heard of before. In those days we had no bathrooms. We'd usually get the fire going and fill it up with kettles full of water and then put the bath in front of the fire.

Or they'd give you a penny and you'd go down to the public baths. If you were rich you paid 2nd and got another towel — and the towel was like wiping yourself on that table — it was as stiff as a board — it was painful to go there. You went in this stinking bath place — hefty looking bloke in there used to be in charge — he hated us kids — he'd say "Right, you're next. Get in that one — no mucking about. Otherwise out you go." So you'd get in there. Then he'd turn the water on. He'd lock the door and turn the water on — so you shouted out, "A bit more hot", or "A bit more cold." Sometimes you were almost scalded. They turned it on outside. You had a number — "more hot in number so and so", and if he felt like it he'd come down, after calling you goodness knows what while he was doing it. He didn't like doing it — you see.

To save time sometimes he'd let two of you go in together as long as you didn't muck around, because, it was quicker for them. If he thought you were mucking about he had a key — he'd come in there and yank you outside. You couldn't be in there too long otherwise he turfed you out. You sat in a waiting room, sat and waited till your turn to go in, but you paid a penny and got this blessed thing they called it a towel. If you paid another penny you got another which was slightly better but I wouldn't say it was comfortable. It was very painful drying yourself.

I had pneumonia when I was 18 and in those days they had no antibiotics or anything like that. They used to poultice you with a linseed poultice, was it? Poultice your back. I used to do a lot of running and one night I must have done about 3 or 4 miles and got very hot and laid down on the wet grass. I think that's what done it. In those days it was 50/50 whether you'd come through it or not. Down would come the doctor and look at you — they never seemed to be too sure.

If you were very ill, the doctor would come and poultice you and also you did get a district nurse. They used to come on a bike in a uniform — they'd come and dress you. Then you had to wait. It worked up to a crisis and you either came out the crisis, or if you didn't you just died. It was awful. Must have been pretty bad because I can remember the parson coming round praying for me.

Table classifying Families according to Number of Rooms Occupied.

Rooms	Families	Total Occupants	Average Occupants per Room
1	410	1,567	3.82
2	1,134	4,398	1.93
3	885	3,841	1.44
4	278	1,378	1.23
5	77	401	1.01
6	55	305	.92
Whole House	37	239	

Medical Officer of Health's report 1921

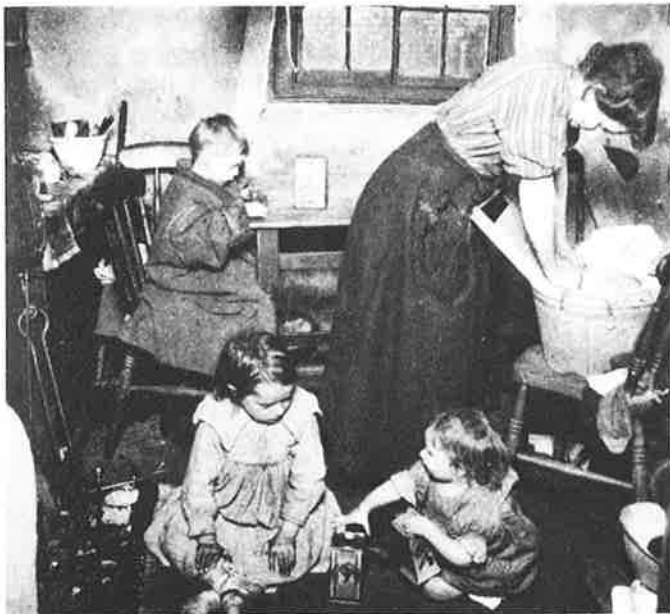
There were times when we didn't even have a dinner. I've come home from school and I remember we used to say grace at school. We used to stand up and say "Be present at our table Lord" . . . You'd be singing that one and come home to nothing.

There were school dinners but, my God, you had to be poor. I didn't even come in that category. The kids that went to school dinners and also to the cleansing station — that's a place they used to send them because they hadn't

Jim Green

I remember the Means Test years ago when they used to come and look in your cupboards, or if you had a piano or wireless they'd say, "Oh well you can sell that." Or any jewellery you had you had to get rid of it, because in them days you could even pawn a picture or an iron, or clothing, any amount of things.

I've known people to do washing, underclothes, wash and iron them and take them to the pawn shop just to get the money perhaps to pay the rent, which was about six shillings for a room. People brought their families up sometimes six at a time. Sometimes they laid four to a bed in the houses, two at the top and two at the bottom. And some people had one room so they had to wash and wash up in that one room. The majority had to go downstairs for water. There was only one scullery for the whole of the house. Well my mother used to have a great big tin bath and we had a copper where she used to do her washing, like a wire copper and everything went in the copper. We'd go and get old wood and cardboard, old boots or anything, shove them up the copper, get the water hot and then we'd have our bath in the scullery. There'd be about five of us in the same water. It just had to be until we got older.



Slum dwellings, Poplar 1920's

Then I used to go round to the baths, the washing baths. We used to pay 2d for a bath, used to take our own soap and they used to give us a towel, there was no talcum powder or anything like that. Just a white linen towel, a bit rough but it was there and if you went in the first class I think you did get a bit of soap. The water used to rush in and you would just have to say more hot or more cold, whatever you wanted. There was always an attendant there, but you were locked in like a cubicle, so that was really how people kept clean. Other than that we used to have a bowl with warm water in, cos them days water had to be boiled in a kettle so we had to put the kettle on — a couple of kettles and a big bowl in a room and you used to strip and just wash from top to bottom.

Say the family only had one room — there'd be a great big bed that would be for the mum and dad and perhaps the youngest baby or perhaps the two youngest, then the others — there would be an iron bed for the others and there'd be two up the top and two at the bottom. There'd be a washing stand. Well in the washing stand there'd be like a bowl where you'd wash in and a soap and flannel and then you'd have another two buckets, one for dirty water and one for clean. Then you had your own gas stove and more often than not you had what they called the open fire with the oven at the side so when you made your fire you could bake, and there was always a kettle on the fire. Some people used to have — I can never remember my mum doing it but she used to make the fresh tea — but some people used to have a pot — a teapot on the hob a big enamel pot and it used to taste vile — got stewed. Used to have to sit there and suffer this cup of tea just to be sociable.

My father did 23 years army service but when he came out he couldn't get work, he was wounded in the army so he had no muscle so therefore he was a bit handicapped. He did get a pension but I think the pension was about 14 shillings a week them days, but somehow or other something happened and I think he sold it back to them so what money he got went. You used to get some women you know they'd go in the pawn shop, and of a Monday morning they'd all line up out there and the man — he had a great big black knob on his door — they'd keep hollering and hooting, "Open up, open up." He'd open up, and they'd all line up and go in there about 8 o'clock. He'd go in and look at the things and he'd say, "There's a stain on the suit, you'll have to have a bit less this week Mrs." And you'd hear the hollering and screaming. "Oh no don't do that I've got to pay the rent." But some of them who didn't care they used to go to the pub soon as they got the money and they'd be there till 3 o'clock. Then they'd all come out dancing, they'd forget all their worries, all their worries were over till they got in and they got a whacking. But that's how it was. My mum worked hard, she worked in the fields — she used to work for Downham — used to call it Whitefoot Lane and my mum had 12 children in all but only six of us lived — I was the eldest. She used to go to work about 7 o'clock in the morning and didn't get home till half past 6 at night, working in the fields over Downham.

They used to pick in the fields, peas, greens and potatoes. Mum used to get the vegetables you know, a few for us, enough to live on and of course me dad used to — when he was home he used to see to us. See that we went to school all right and was clean for school. On the window sill there was always our whitened plimsoles for when we used to go to church on Sunday morning. There was a shop in the High Street used to be called Mumrose and they used to sell material. You could buy flannellette in them days about 3/3d a yard and my mum used to make our peticoats and our vests as best she could, and perhaps she'd pay someone to make us a couple of dresses for the girls.

Jane Birkett

I was born in the Walworth common workhouse, Westmorland Road, because my father was out of work and had absolutely no money. Women who couldn't afford the hospital fee were taken there to have their children, and later we were transferred to East Dulwich Hospital. We were there for a fortnight and home we came to one back room, in No. 12 Faraday Street, Walworth. I had a brother and a sister and we all lived, slept and ate in one back room. We paid four and six a week for it. The hospital charges were nothing because we had nothing. Mother couldn't have me in hospital because she couldn't afford to pay for it and she couldn't have me at home in this one room because there were no facilities for it. Dad would sometimes get a job at three pounds per week, "navying" (that's the only work he really knew) and because he was in very ill health and very occasionally, although he was still a young man, couldn't get to work because of the weather conditions and because of his chest complaint, he was sacked . . . right back to the workhouse we would go.

A man used to come down, name of Mr. Steele and inspect and verify what Dad told him, that we had nothing. He would open all the food cupboards; he would look under lino, in case there was any money hidden, and he would sum it all up, and when he realised there was absolutely nothing but a crust of bread left, he would give us tickets.

My father and I used to take a great big deep bag every week and over we'd go to the workhouse, on a Saturday morning, and we would be given two long tin loaves, already half stale, half a pound of margarine, that would have to last all the week and a pound of sugar between the 5 of us. We used to go to the workhouse and

sit on these long forms with brown painted walls, and they used to pull up a wooden shutter and shout, "Yes, what do you want?" and we would give them this ticket and out would come the goods. Goods! a meagre amount of sugar, bread, and a piece of cheese. For things like potatoes etc. you would take these tickets to various shops to get them, to subsidise all that, because we had nothing to pay the rent.

If my brother had a decent suit, and it had to be decent, mother would take it on the Monday morning and get three and six on that, at the pawnbrokers in Inville Road, on the Corner of Portland Street. Everybody used to line up on Monday mornings to take their clothes and if there was a spot of something on that suit, they would take off sixpence, so you'd only get three shillings, but I can't remember any of my clothing going there.

They would pawn anything. My mother used to pawn her wedding ring for a few extra bob, and so by the end of the week, when Pop was in work, out it would come again so my brother could wear his suit on Sunday. If he couldn't wear the suit he didn't go out.

When I was five years old, on my first day at school, I sat next to a ginger haired girl named Dorothy. She was lousy as a cuckoo. But I was five years old and I didn't know, and I used to go home scratching. The school "Nitty Nora" used to come round with her fine steel comb and sent me home to tell my mother I had fleas, lice, whatever they were, and I had to go to Addington Street Cleansing Station. They didn't cut all my hair off but they gave me a good "doing." So that was once I was lousy. My mother took me away from that school because I was lousy.

Molly



I was mostly like everybody else, poor, hard-up, one of thirteen, nine survived. My mother always had to work very hard, my dad was at work, but he never used to give her the money. He used to spend it himself, because he liked his drink, so she never had much.

I lost a brother at fourteen he died with pneumonia. No doctors knew what was wrong with him; didn't know what medicine to give him. They just left him. He just lay on the sofa and my mother used to sit up with him all night. One morning she came upstairs and she was terribly upset and crying, and she'd got a lot of clothes on her arm, and we asked her what was the matter, and she just said that he was dead. His name was Victor. He was dead. We all cried, and I remember the thing that stood out most in my mind was everybody turning out in the street for the funeral because he was so well liked. The horses, they had the plumage. Yes, because they all put the money for him to have this particular funeral, because he was the type of lad to go round offering — knocking on anybody's door to see if they wanted any little jobs done or errands run.

Yes, I remember when I was on my way up to bed we had to go to bed very early, when mother had had another baby. The bedroom door was open a little way and I peeped round, and on the little recess there was a tiddly little white coffin, and after we'd got upstairs I peeped over the banisters and the man came and took it away.

Violet Becroft

In them days, I used to go to school with no boots or shoes on because my mother and father couldn't afford them. We used to have to get the Daily Herald because there was a little number printed on the top of the Herald, and you would cut that out and take it round to the Wesleyan Hall and get a jug of soup and this is how hard up we was.

My father died and mother couldn't afford any clothes for me. The school picked out certain boys whose parents were hard up and they would clothe them and we had to go to a special tailors by the water side — Newmans the name was — and be measured up for these suits. It was a stiff collar with a bow and a stiff suit, real strong stuff, and clod-hopper boots; we used to be fitted right out. But the only thing was you had to go to Sunday School for that, and we had to go to Church on Sunday.

In them days you've got to remember if you wanted any money off the R.O., the relieving officer, first of all they sent an inspector down. "Radio — that's got to go. Piano — that's got to go." Before you got any money out of them you had to sell half your house.

Fred Parker

In the old days we used to have a lot of bugs. We used to have to clear the room, seal it all, seal the windows with brown sticky paper so that no draught could get up and get out and no air could get in. They used to get the sulphur candle and light it and leave it in there and that's supposed to bring the bugs out and kill them. It stunk terribly once you opened the room. You had to leave it about 12 hours and when that was burnt you'd clear it and the nits were supposed to be all cleared off like that.

Bill Welch

Where my mother was concerned as far as I ever can remember she was always ill. We never knew what with but it was always something to do with her stomach. That's all we were told, so that I as a child, as an only girl, had to take more than my share in the home and that went on right until she died in 1940.

My mother's mother died in St. Nicholas hospital and we were living on Plumstead Common and they brought her body home to my mother's house and I was working in Woolwich then and I was so terribly nervous that when I got home from work at night my father had to stand at the gate and see me in and I walked straight upstairs to my bedroom, I walked straight past the front room where she laid because I was so frightened. They took me in to see her one day and I was so convinced that she moved as I looked at her and I was so terrified that I couldn't walk past the door without somebody with me after that until the day she was buried.

Ruth Granville

SHOWING THE NUMBER OF PREMISES, ROOMS AND BEDDING DISINFECTED DURING THE YEAR 1921.

Date 1921	Premises.	Rooms.	Beds.	Pillows.	Bolsters.	Mattresses.	Sheets	Blankets.	Odd articles	Articles destroyed.
January ..	144	150	90	202	65	52	88	179	190	
February ..	111	115	59	158	51	38	90	126	188	
March ..	110	112	52	152	52	36	60	93	120	
April ..	128	142	87	161	58	22	57	94	139	
May ..	131	156	76	152	46	29	72	89	150	1 bed, 2 pillows, 3 odd articles.
June ..	132	152	72	157	58	32	80	85	101	1 mattress
July ..	138	170	81	145	60	25	80	75	137	2 beds
August ..	116	137	77	136	53	21	70	51	125	1 mattress, 4 odd articles
September ..	117	132	70	156	43	22	77	76	180	2 beds, 3 mattresses, 2 palliasses 1 bolster, 6 pillows
October ..	162	186	98	195	76	30	126	154	316	2 palliasses
November ..	168	183	101	215	69	37	139	193	372	3 beds, 2 mattresses, 1 bolster, 1 pillow, 7 odd articles
December ..	194	214	114	280	100	66	132	246	404	
Total ..	1651	1848	977	2105	731	419	1071	1461	2417	

We had a piano bought us kids but it was Hire Purchase of course and when the bloke came round to see my mother because she was left with 8 kids all under 14 — my father died very young through hard work in the mills — and he said to me, "You'll have to get rid of that piano." They had to take the piano away, and we really liked that piano. Then we used to go down Shad Thames to get these quarter loaves of bread and when you got them you couldn't eat them. My mother used to cut them in thick chunks and she'd put skimmed milk on it and feed us out of the bowl on her lap so we all got a portion.

When I had to go to hospital, they couldn't treat me because I was so weak, so I had three quarters of a pint of milk at Guys Hospital before they treated me. They used to give me ultra-violet ray, I was so weak as a child, and you were hungry I can tell you. My mother had eight kids, couldn't feed any of us so she used to get this skimmed milk and bread from Shad Thames. We gave them our tickets for bread, and when we got it, the bread was stale and we couldn't eat it so she used to cut it up and soak it in three farthings worth of skimmed milk. Used to have these cannister tins to put milk in and they gave you extra and we all sat around — no sugar in it — we were so hungry, we were all youngsters, all under fourteen and they used to deal us out on the spoon all round.

Connie Richards

You see there was a very strong community spirit, not only in my street but every street. This was brought about by a common denominator of being hard up and poor. Directly there was a death announced along my street all the neighbours drew their front room curtains or blinds. We had those venetian blinds on the cord and they were pulled and they were never pulled back again until the day of the funeral after the funeral had left the street. And that may be for three or four days those blinds were drawn. I remember as a child one of the neighbours, a Mrs. Churchill, she died and we were specifically told not to play outside Mrs. Churchill's door and not to make a noise in the street. And then of course the neighbours rallied round. There was the usual wreath from the neighbours; somebody volunteered to go round and collect the money to buy a wreath.

I remember on the day of my mother's funeral the carriage, and the horses with the plumes. You don't see them these days of course, only on special occasions, and I think it cost a bomb to do that, and I remember wondering where they got the money from. I think in those days you belonged to the Prudential or whatever it was. It was a problem buying black, everybody had to buy black and you used to put yourself in debt. Families used to put themselves in debt with what was called the Provident Clothing Society. The women bought black dresses and men bought black suits and you put yourself in debt for a funeral because that money you had to pay it back at two bob or half a crown a week and sometimes you had great difficulty in paying the money back, but you had to do it that way you see.



I remember the cortege drawing up outside the house, and my mother was laid out in the front room. The night before the funeral we were talking in the family and I mentioned — I said "Where is mum?" She was laid out in the front room and my brother said, "Would you like to see her?" and I said yes. I know there were some disapproving looks because the other members of the family

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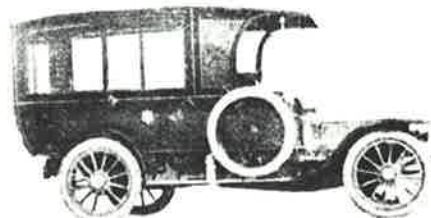
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didn't agree with that, but my brother took me in and of course he had to hold me in his arms because the coffin was on the trestles. He stroked her forehead and asked me to do it and I did and she was stone cold, and I remember wriggling out of his arms and running out of the room and closing the door. It was March, and on her coffin there was a spray of daffodils, and on the mantelpiece with all the drapes that we used to have in those days were flowers, mainly daffodils and the whole place smelt of the varnish of the coffin and the daffodils and I can still remember that most vividly.

Neighbours rallied round at births, deaths, weddings, funerals. Neighbours used to come in as they did at my mother's funeral and prepare all the food. I remember, we had a ham salad. I think, that was about the cheapest thing you could buy anyway and lettuce and that. I had got a black jersey and a new pair of black trousers, all on the Provident Clothing, and just before my mother's coffin was carried out to go into the hearse, I remember all the neighbours standing round and I went out and quite cheerfully said, "My mum's being buried today." And a woman patted me on the head. I didn't really know, I know that I never cried because I simply didn't understand what it was all about. All I knew was she wouldn't be with us any more and that was more or less the end.

VISITS FROM AND TO THE DOCTOR

The doctor used to come in every morning to do my ears and he'd sit me on the kitchen table. I was only about two, but I can remember it as plain as anything. He always used to bring me a piece of blue ribbon to tie up my hair. I think it was just sort of drops he used to give me for earache. He only used to charge a shilling and if you couldn't afford a shilling he did it for nothing. Ever such a kind man. Very tall, very slim, grey hair, I can see him now. He had a leather bag like a carpet bag with all his bits and pieces but he was so gentle. I mean I wasn't a bit frightened of him. It was sometimes a problem for my mother to find a shilling for the doctor. You just found it. We had one doctor there, Doctor Marsh, if you hadn't got it — you had to have your money on the table as he walked in the door because if you hadn't got your money on the table he wouldn't look at you. That was a difference with the doctors.

My brother Bob, he was a terror. He used to play my mum up. He used to make — only devilment! I can see my mum now, sitting in an armchair in the corner, she'd got a lot of shoes. I can see her now picking up this shoe trying to hit him with it. One day he came in and he said, "I've broke me leg, I've broke me leg." Of course my dad went up to clout him, but he really had broke his leg. He'd been jumping up and down on the kerb and he'd tripped. Doctor Joy was a very nice doctor. He came and looked at my brother, and took him himself down to the hospital in his car. He was in Beckenham Cottage Hospital for six weeks. They kept you in hospital in them days for six weeks with a broken leg.

Elsie House

Dad was in bed ill one day and mum sent for Doctor Buchanan. He came, and while he was upstairs sitting with Dad, Mum saw this old trilby hat on the end of the banisters, slung on there, blooming dirty old hat. She took it out, and slung it in the back yard. When the Doctor came down he's looking everywhere for his hat. She said, "What are you looking for Doctor?" He said, "Me hat." She said, "Wait a minute, I think I put it outside for a minute." She had to go and get it. Slung his old hat out and thought it was mine.

Bill Welch

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When you went along to the doctor they had a lot more time. They mixed up our medicine too. They would go into a little back room, you know, set aside. And I always remember, they'd bring out a bottle and it was wrapped in white paper often with a bit of sealing wax on top, you know, sort of all done up neatly, so you didn't have to bother to go and queue up at the chemist, and they did seem to have more time. I mean I can remember 1928 or, was it 1929, I had tonsillitis and fever and the doctor came and I was asleep. "Well", he said to my mother, "don't wake her up", and he sat by the side of the bed till I woke up. He had the time to do it, which unfortunately they haven't got now.

Margaret Kippen

I was always ill as a child. Every winter I had chest infections. In a way I suppose I helped to keep my parents poor, having to pay for the doctor. He used to charge two shillings or two and six pence to call at the house or something like that, give you some coloured medicine. I remember now, he used to make it up himself, that's right. When you got medicine, cough mixture or whatever, he used to make it up and then you could call back for it. There was a little hatch in the door; you'd lift it up and behind it, you'd get the bottles through. Funny old chap, our doctor was. I can't really say that I would have had much faith in him if he'd been around nowadays.

Dorothy Barton

There was no National Health Service in those days and you had to pay for the doctor. I burned my leg very bad and I couldn't walk for three months. My brother in law was there, and he ran to get the doctor. Before he came back all my leg was huge great blisters. The doctor was 500 yards away, and when he heard the knock at the door, he didn't answer at first . . . but my brother-in-law said "Dr. Wilkie, I can see you're there." He came in the end.

After that, the doctor or the district nurse came almost every day to dress it and I had to pay them 3/6d a visit. They came alternate days. I was badly burned, second degree burns — boiling fat — I won't go into details. It was in war time and the hospitals had to be kept more or less for war casualties and therefore I had to be treated at home. They treated me with Lassars Paste — and when the district nurse came she used to say, "This is just like wall papering you."

We had to provide our own linen bandages. I had very good neighbours and they gave me old sheets and things. I had to get those all cut up in strips. Of course the nurse and doctor didn't come so frequently when it began to heal. But the first month rather than run up a bill, because honestly, my husband was in the forces and all I was getting was, you know, sergeants pay, and I said we couldn't afford a big bill so I therefore paid as and when the doctor came.

Elizabeth from Sandbach Old People's Home

When I was taken ill, the people I was living with took me to a doctor in Bermondsey. Name of Doctor Salter, and all he said is, "You need a good clearing out." He gave me a prescription to get some senna pods. Bitter it was, and it acted on you quite quickly and you knew all about it. When we were little it was our Friday nights to have a dose of liquorice powder, liquid paraffin, beecham pills. Yes, bath night with a dose of liquorice powder.

George Taylor

The famous Dr. Salter of Bermondsey



To call the doctor in we used to pay him half a crown and the doctor used to give you the medicine for that as well. They made it at the surgery. It always used to be liquid. The old doctors didn't have cars in those days either. It was either a bike or walk. My sister went out with her young man and the next we heard was somebody came knocking at the door. "Val's ill." "Where is she then?" "Down home." Now this is right down Rotherhithe Street. The doctor was up the top of Rotherhithe tunnel. When I got down there she'd got a pain in her side and right away I said she'd got appendicitis. So I had to get on the blower quick to get Doctor Brown down and he came down walking, he was puffing and blowing and right away he got her away. But in them days if you called a doctor out he came right away, don't matter how many patients was in his surgery. He stopped work. "I won't be long. I'll be back." And he used to come out, but now they don't. You've got to wait until the surgery's finished. But he got her away and that saved her because he said it was turning to peritonitis.

Fred Parker

We used to have an Irish doctor, Sullivan. He used to come into the house and say, "Where's me cup of tea?" He wasn't shy I swear it neither. "That's no bloody good. It's not bleeding hot enough." If you didn't have the cup of tea for him he wouldn't treat you.

The treatment I had from Dr. Sullivan was the usual short cuts to a fit future, like castor oil and all that kind of thing.

Albert Ellis

I can remember as a child looking up to the doctor as though he were exalted. Going into a doctor's surgery and you're half afraid to say what you've gone for because of their attitude. Oh yes, class came into it definitely so, but it was also the fact of his job added to it.

Olly Hollingsworth

We used to have Dr. Richardson. Oh he was a funny old Doctor. I used to have him for all my children. And if one was ill they'd all be up in the bedroom with that one, wouldn't they? And he'd sit on the bed and he'd say, 'Eeny, meeny, miney, mo', and the one who got it, got 6d. He used to be so funny. Oh they used to like the Doctor coming, didn't they? They had more patience with you.

You could go to a doctor and talk to him and he would understand what you were talking about. Today it's just, "Here's your prescription," and you're out the door. It's true. You go in and they say, "Oh so and so, oh yes, here you are." And you go out the same as you went in. Well, that's what my doctor's like, anyway. "You've got to live with it." That's what he says. It's stupid isn't it; he just keeps saying to me, "You've got to learn to live with it." I am living with it now, aint I? Instead of helping you, that's how it goes on.

Flo Chandler

My mother was seriously ill and then she died with valvular disease of the heart as they called it. She was only 55 and I do remember Doctor Hogarth at Blackwall Lane. That used to be a big house standing in its own grounds and that was Doctor Hogarth's. He was the local doctor for people in my street as far as I know and I think if you called him out it was either two shillings to visit him or 2/6d if he was called out. I remember him coming to see my mother. My eldest sister told me that I'd got to be very quiet because the doctor was coming with his big black bag you know. I used not to be afraid of the doctor, but I used to think he was somebody very special. Of course I didn't realise the seriousness of my mother's condition. He used to come sometimes in the morning, sometimes in the evening.

I should imagine that doctors in those days, with the poverty, had a hard struggle. I was told by one of my brothers, brother Charlie that sometimes we were so hard up that he used to say, "I won't charge you for this visit." And I think you know it was a question of how the doctor viewed the situation. This doctor was probably aware of the conditions and the poverty that did exist in areas such as Greenwich. And I know that he seemed to be looked upon as somebody special, not only by me as a small child but by the whole family, I suppose because he did these little special favours, not charging.

But eventually of course my mother had a very severe stroke and I remember her, my sister said before she died it was only a matter of two or three days I think before she died, my sister saying, "Mum wants to see you". and I remember sitting on the bed and she asked for her purse, she had difficulty in speaking because of the stroke and I didn't realise, I wasn't worried about it you know. I thought well she's ill, but I didn't know anything about the stroke or anything because I wasn't told and I didn't know, and she insisted that I had a penny to go to school to pay my fare as it was very foggy. Well it wasn't. And of course not knowing the situation I was very pleased to be given the penny, but my sister said, "No, he doesn't need it, the school isn't far away," which it wasn't, and I remember being terribly upset because my sister stopped me taking the penny and I remember going off to school feeling very disgruntled. Then it may have been a day or two after that I got up one morning and everything was quiet and they said that my mother had died.

I was eight, and I remember my brothers and my sister sitting in our kitchen and obviously they were discussing the funeral. My father was there and my brother Alf sitting there and I said, "Has mum gone to heaven?" "Oh yes, she's there now." And I remember saying, "Can you draw me an angel?" and as he drew, the tears were falling down his cheeks and dropping on the paper.

Arthur Wellard

Woolwich Medical Treatment Centre 1914

We had a nice doctor, Doctor Kelly, in Greenwich, by Blackwall Lane. He was Irish and ever so nice. He used to come and sit on the bed and talk to you. Dad had colitis, and he was very bad and the doctor came nearly every other day, and he used to say to Dad, "Don't worry about the money. When you've got it pay me. If you haven't got it, don't worry." And he said, "You have to go away for a weeks holiday", so he went to his sisters at Pevensy Bay. And we were more ill after that week when we come home than when we went because we all caught the flu and colds. She had one loaf and she made that last three days for all of us, and she made a joint of meat last four days. My dad and my brother was alright because they went to my Uncle Alf's for the day, and Mum and I and my little brother Jimmy, we were left behind so we had to have what was going. But that's the way you had to carry on when you couldn't afford to go away in hospital or anything. If you'd got relations at a seaside, you went there. But of course Mum gave my aunt all her wages and we couldn't go out. We was hungry, but we couldn't go out and buy something because she'd got Mum's wages.

But the doctor was ever so nice, and he got called up during the war and got killed at Dunkirk. Yeah, he was an Army Doctor.

Well he told me, if I didn't get well I wouldn't have one of these sweets that he carried in his pocket, so I used to get well just to have the sweet.

Joan Tyrrell





Norwood Medical Treatment Centre 1911

In those days you went up to the doctors and they gave you the usual cough mixture. You never went down to the chemists. He would look at you, and they were old fashioned but they were pretty good. Then you paid half a crown, which to us was a fortune actually, but that included your medicine. After he had seen you, he would go out to his dispensary at the back and get his bottles and fill them up, mix it all up for you, cork it up, and you'd take it home.

Jim Green

When we were small and needed treatment, my mother took us to the sixpenny doctor at the ferry, Dr. Summerskill. And we went into this dusty waiting room with nothing on the floor, all dark green paint and just sat and waited our turn. When we received our treatment or whatever we paid a sixpence. But I don't know how my mother managed. She had to pay a Dr. Nealy who came to see her because she had a heart problem and every month I remember seeing his bill sent in. My mother must have found it extremely difficult to have paid it because

although my father was a skilled maintenance engineer in a lead works, his salary wasn't very high. This was called a cheap doctor. And I think she was a socialist too.

May Wellard

The only thing that stuck in my memory was going to the doctors, what they called the six penny doctor at the Woolwich Ferry in Bellwater Lane. There used to be a hut and the doctor's surgery was there. Yes, it was like a poor doctor. I suppose having three of us she used to take us down there. Mum paid the doctor sixpence I think, for a consultation and then she got a prescription. That was made up on the same premises, in a dispensary. You used to take it to the person in there and she used to make up the medicine. I can never remember them dispensing tablets; everything was in liquids.

We suffered very badly from rheumatism when we were younger. We always seemed to be in the doctor's surgery. Mum took us down there and we kept having that medicine, some atrocious tasting medicine I can remember that. You see it just rotted the teeth. My brother and I lost our teeth very young.

Joan Welch

There was an institution called the Board of Guardians and they really were a sort of fore-runner of Social Services in that if you were ill you went to the Board of Guardians which was in Rectory Place, and they paid for a doctor to go every day, and that doctor I knew was Harold Mortimer-Wise. He was in practise here till 1954, till he was eighty. He was also the factory doctor around here. He was a barrister as well as a doctor, he was very highly qualified and a brilliant man, he could speak and read all sorts of Chinese dialects.

I remember people coming to my father who was on the Board and getting a ticket for going to see this Charity Doctor as he was called or the Poverty Doctor. Dr. Harold Mortimer-Wise was followed in that job by Charles Scott-Webb who had a surgery in Frances Street and lived in Eglinton Hill, and then it was abolished in 1948 with the Health Service. But that was a very good system, they used to get things called Provident checks, which they could take to the chemist and get things like pneumonia jackets. They were special waistcoats made of cotton wool and stuff like thermogene and if you had pneumonia it was just a toss up whether you came round or not, and using pneumonia jackets was a vital part of your pneumonia treatment. Otherwise all they could give you was a sort of aspirin.

There were some doctors down by the ferry, and Dr. Edith Scott-Summerskill had a surgery down there, and then she was followed on by husband and wife, Ross and Gordon, and they used to consult for sixpence. They were slightly looked down on by the other doctors. They had a little shop down by the ferry, just one of that row of shops down as far as Hare Street, you could go there and consult for sixpence and I think you got your medicine as well.

I remember going with Dr. Wise when I was a student. She used to take me round a lot, and I remember going to a house in Eaglesfield and they had about three children, one after the other, went down with something, like measles. In those days, there was nothing much you could do for measles except go and sit and hold their hands, just sympathetic treatment. I remember her coming out to the car to me and I used to keep a notebook for her of what she'd taken, and she said to me, "You can't put anything down for these they've run out of their Insurance." But she went on going to see them. There was that sense of duty and vocation.

You couldn't tout for custom, you just had to hope that people passing by would see your plate and think, "Oh there's a doctor there, I'll call in." This doesn't matter now, but in those days there was what they called head hunting: you did things to get patients. When you went to the theatre you made sure somebody came to the stage and said, "Is Dr. Smith in the house?" There are very subtle ways of advertising and that was one of them.

I know there was a legend to do with Beecham Pills. A man used to fake a sort of desperate turn on a busy railway station, and then get up and walk away saying, "Well if I hadn't taken Beecham Pills, I'd have been carried off on a stretcher."

What you tried to do, well you got on Lloyd George's panel of course, which meant you treated the working classes, and working men, and they got their consultation and medicine free, and the spin off was that you usually got their families, and they had to pay. Some doctors had things called clubs: you paid say sixpence a week, and then when you fell ill it was like BUPA, a primitive BUPA. You got your treatment and medicine you see, and of course their list of clients or patients was their panel list.

The other thing was midwifery. If you confined a woman you usually got the family. Now of course, they're registered with a doctor, and there is a little bit of hassle if you want to change your doctor, but in those days if you went to see Dr X because he was open on a Wednesday afternoon, the next time when the kids had measles you might go to see Dr. Y because you knew that he would give you a bigger bottle of medicine.

There wasn't anything you could really give until antibiotics. Well there was good old aspirin, willow was quite often used, hyssop, there's all sorts of things. Digitalis, oh yes good old digitalis and belladonna which of course is lethal, but in small doses is good for anti-spasmodic things. There is missedowl — which is a white mixture which was for stomachs — God knows what that had in it. You had a missedcreaty which was a brown mixture for bad coughs and you had a sort of lemon syrup with a bit of iron in it which they called astenia, when they were a little bit off song, for these rather delicate young ladies, there wasn't much you could give really, just change the colour.

Dr. Gorman

In those days we doctors did an enormous amount of visiting. People expected to be visited and the doctor visited them; quite different from today when it's very difficult to get any doctor to come and look at you.

People either wrote or they called at the house and asked you to visit them. A relative would call or a child would call at the surgery. You see the post was so good in those days that for instance if you posted a letter before half past four in the afternoon, it would be delivered 9 o'clock at night and there was time to write a reply. The last post went at 10 o'clock and it would be delivered the next morning, for a halfpenny.

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Deptford Children's Health Clinic 1911

I used to find generally after having the children one of my teeth would be bad. I used to go up the High Street. Half a crown, 5/-, they'd pull your head off. That shop up the High Street . . . where the undertakers were. I used to pull childrens' teeth out. Yes, if a kid up our street had a loose tooth, they'd always knock at my door and ask my Mum, Mrs. Fren, can your Dolly pull our teeth out? Oh, I used to love it, I used to pull 'em all out.

Dolly Harrison

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There used to be a man with a tray round his neck like the old match sellers or the ice cream sellers in the cinema — they used to have cough sweets.

Yes, we had a dentist up here in Albury Street where the children used to go from school to have their teeth taken out and that was for free and then we used to have another one in Reginald Road. If we had any teeth loose she used to get a bit of cotton, she'd tie it on the tooth and she'd tie it on the handle of the door and it would come out. My mum used to send us round there purposely to have them pulled out. That was just for baby teeth.

I'll give you an instance about a dentist — I was working at Elastofirm Company, Grange Road, Bermondsey and I had this bad tooth and my face was right down like that. I was painful, and I couldn't get no sleep so I go along to Deptford High Street into the dentist who was over the undertakers, and he said to me, "You'll have to have gas. I'll take it out for you in a couple of days time because you've got an abscess under it, but it will be 7/6d because I've got to pay the man to do the gas." Well, I was hardly earning much more than that, and my mum didn't have it, so I thought to myself, what am I gonna do?

I still had to go to work because we needed the money, so some woman I was working with says to me, "Why don't you go into the solarium?" That was in Grange Road, Bermondsey, so I went in there. I saw the doctor. He said, "Oh you have got a bad face. Where do you live?" So I said "Deptford." "Sorry", he said, "you're out the borough. Where do you work?" So I said, "Elastofirm in Grange Road." "Very well," he said. And do you know he took that tooth out and all I gave him was a shilling and I was a right as rain. I think you had to pay to have a tooth out, it had to be really bad to go to hospital.

People would keep working them loose to get them out. People were more or less frightened of dentists. I suppose they just suffered.



Camberwell Treatment Centre 1925

People didn't used to go to have their eyes tested. They used to go and buy glasses off the stall or Woolworths. They didn't used to worry about having their eyes tested. If they thought they couldn't see they'd just find a pair of glasses to put on and hope for the best. They'd use a pair belonging to someone who'd died, or they'd go to Woolworths and get a pair. In them days you didn't have no television and some could read, some couldn't — I suppose there was less call for glasses. In my mum's time there was lots of people who couldn't read or write. It was either they didn't go to school or the learning wasn't there because them days they used to have to pay to go to school. They had to pay a penny to go to school. My mum was a bit of a cripple so she never had a lot of schooling. She couldn't read.

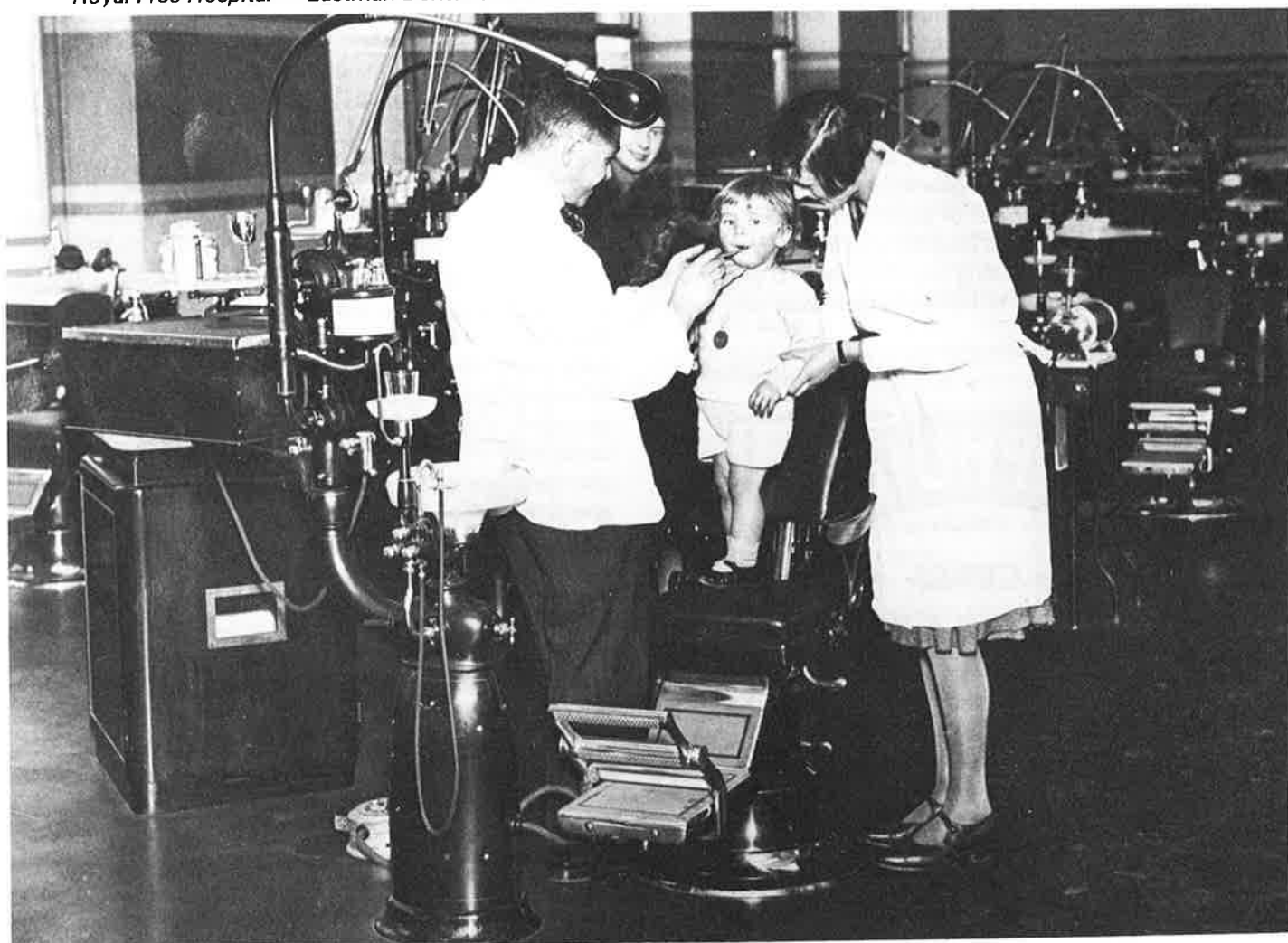
My mum never had false teeth. Her teeth just fell out, but she had two in her head for years and she could eat anything, apple or anything cos her gums had hardened. She got by, she was quite healthy really. She never went in hospital in her life. I've got a friend now she's 71 in June, she hasn't got a doctor, she's never been to a doctor and she's never been in hospital — honest — and she's happy-go-lucky and she's very good-hearted.

Jane Birkett

Royal Westminster Ophthalmic: Treatment for squint c.1930



Royal Free Hospital — Eastman Dental Clinic 1930



HOME CURES

If you had a splinter or something infected, you used to get a clean piece of rag or lint, if you had lint, and you'd get a piece of bread and you would pour hot water over the bread and a bit of sugar or sometimes they used to have a sugar and soap poultice. Before they put it on you, they used to have a lot of salt water, because salt's the finest thing there is for anything like that, such as a boil. You used to bathe it with salt water and then put this sugar and soap or bread poultice on.

If a baby had a cough there used to be rubbing oils. There used to be the amber oil, oil of cloves, eucalyptus, camphor, that was the rubbing oils. You could go to the chemist and he would make it up for you, and you used to rub their chests and backs and under their little feet. They were for bronchitis or colds — and then the other thing was the medicine to take; that was syrup of squills, ipecacuanha wine, paragoric, glycerine and lemon. You went into the chemist and he made it up for you for 6d. a bottle, that's all. So it was cheaper than going to the doctor.

The doctor if he gave you anything I think you had to pay for it, and it used to cost more having a doctor out than going to the surgery. If you wanted a certificate to say why you hadn't gone to school, you had to pay. There was more notice taken for children staying away from school, not like today, the truant officer was always around to the mother. In those days, it was compulsory to have a baby vaccinated. My mum would have none of us done and I know there was a bit of bother once and my mum had to go and get some sort of a form and get it signed by a JP, but she never had none of us done. I don't know why — perhaps she didn't believe in any of us being hurt. I didn't have any of my children done and they've not been too bad really so I suppose it's the luck of the draw.

Now even today if I go to bed and I've got a bit of a sore throat I'll get up and I'll give myself two spoonfuls of vinegar and a tablespoon full of sugar and I'll drink that. It helps my sore throat. Some people believe in gargling with salt water, that's a good thing and they used to say if you had chillblains they used to bathe them in their own urine to cure them.

Jane Birkett

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CURES

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“I have suffered for years with an ulcerated leg, and nothing reduces inflammation as well as taking “SEN-AL” Beans. I would not be without them.” — Mrs. K.

3, Aberdeen Walk, Scarborough.

“A visitor to Scarborough gave me some of your “SEN-AL” Beans. I find they suit me so well, I shall be glad if you would send me a box, stamps for same enclosed.” — (Mrs.) E. Swales.

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Unless it was something really very bad, we used to cope without going to the doctor. A chemist would come round on a motorbike with a little sidecar. We lived near a park and I often used to get stung and he would — I remember him quite clearly putting his two thumbnails and squeezing and bringing the sting out and then giving me some little thing to put on it. And one obviously paid pennies for that. He had a big sort of box on his sidecar absolutely filled. A motor bike sidecar. He used to come round, I suppose, once a week like everybody else. And you stopped him if you needed him. It was just rather like a big wooden trunk on the sidecar, and I really can't remember what it looked like inside but I clearly remember him getting the sting out and dabbing it with something.

We got sore throats as children, and if mother didn't want to pay for medicine, she would get oatmeal and mix it with vinegar and wrap it in a cloth while it was hot. Then she tied it round your neck. And I suppose the heat actually cured the sore throat. And then she would get twopennyworth of precipitate powder and two ounces of lard and she would mix the precipitate powder well into the lard, keep it in little jars and that was like salve ointment if you needed it for sore lips or anything like that.

May Wellard

You just had to manage the best you could at home and when I had my eldest boy he used to get bronchitis an awful lot and I had to have a fire in the bedroom and a steaming kettle and lay him in a cot on the floor so he could inhale the steam to ease him, with the doctor calling perhaps every other day giving him medicine. Then I used to put thermogene on his chest, like a cotton wool impregnated with peppery material it was, and it used to create the heat to save the inflammation because he had difficulty in breathing.

We used to make sure we gave them regular opening medicines to keep them as fit as possible, because they'd tend to eat anything. If they had colds and coughs, we gave them cough mixture and then kept them in the warm and let nature take its course. We did the best we could. But if they were ill, I had to send for the doctor and he would give them medicine and I would nurse them through again. When they had whooping cough I had two of the younger ones down with whooping cough. I had two in a cot and I went downstairs into the sitting room and I slept on the floor on a mattress to look after them at night because my husband was sleeping in the other bedroom, so I nursed them through that night and day and got them over that.

In ordinary illnesses I would just go to the chemist and get a bottle of medicine of some sort that the chemist recommended, because in those days they were real old chemists and herbalists. They knew what they were giving you and they were very very effective. There are no chemists about like that today I'm convinced because it goes back to nature and the herbs. Now in the 1918 'flu we had quinine mixtures. I bought quinine mixture because people were dying all round us and luckily as a family we all got through the 'flu without any of catching it by being very strict about dosing them with this quinine, so that's how we got over the 1918 'flu.

But when the children had bad coughs later on my husband used to cut up a Spanish onion and put it on a dish or plate and tip it sideways and sprinkle it with brown sugar and then we used to give them the juice of that for their bad coughs and that used to be very effective.

Ruth Granville

DR. KYNASTON

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For any inflammation of the eye or anything like that it was always tea leaves out of the teapot — I use that today. It's better than all that Optrex and stuff — out in a cloth and just bandaged. I remember a couple of years ago, I was due to go out with my son and his wife, for a birthday celebration. They were taking Fred and me out for a show and dinner. And on the very morning we were due to go on my birthday, this eye came up for no reason at all. And out came the tea leaves and on went the poultice. And I just lay all day with it. And believe me, by the night time it was gone.

Dolly Davey.

For ear aches — Use bread poultice, bread with plenty of salt wrapped in muslin and heated over steam; wrap this round the head.

For coughs and colds — soak an onion in brown sugar and drink the resulting liquid. Inhale tar fumes for bad chests. Make a tea using fresh garlic.

For tooth ache — chew bread and apply oil of cloves.

For hangovers — wipe your face all over with an orange cut in half. Drink mixture of peanut butter and carnation milk. Mix cornmeal and cold water into a paste. A stall of cures for hangovers would be popular.

Never use butter on burns or on a baby suffering from cradle cap.

Swaddling — this has advantages and disadvantages. The baby can feel trapped and not develop full use of its limbs or it can make it feel secure and help the child to sleep.

Round bellied in pregnancy means a girl. Babies with or without hernias were often bound around the abdomen with a crepe bandage and a penny to flatten the navel. For nappy rash use plain cold water. Use egg whites. Use vaseline.

Circumcision was widely practised for health reasons, and not solely for religious reasons.

For healthy blood — drink sasparilla and take garlic.

For boils — place a bottle neck over the boil to draw out the puss.

For bee stings — use bi-carbonate of soda.

For excess breast milk after a baby has been weaned — take Epsom Salts. Beware, it also cures constipation!

For warts — put raw beef on the wart, then bury the beef. When the beef has rotted, then the wart will disappear. Get someone to buy the wart from you. Every night before you sleep, lick the warts. Wet a red-topped match and place on wart.

Use of urine for relief of chillblains, corns and baldness. A baby's wet nappy should be wiped on its face if you wish it to have curly hair.

For styes — place the breast milk of a woman who has borne a boy on the affected eyes.

Arthritis — drink a mixture of cider, vinegar and clear honey in hot water. Drink this three times a day.

It was the custom at school to be given a spoonful of malt, cod liver oil and sometimes virol, and each pupil would be given the things with the same spoon.

A cow licking the head can cure baldness.

Sally Weston, Lola Young and the Morley College Local History Project.

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We used to have a camphor bag on for a bad chest. Then there was demerara sugar and lemon juice which made its own mixture. And I remember liquorice powder and syrup of figs and all that. Mum used to get bad headaches, she used to suffer with her head, and she used to have a settlers powder, which is really like an Alka Seltzer.

There was a lot of pneumonia. You wore a brown paper jacket and all this special grease on, the old goose fat.

Nellie Carroll

Mum used to get a turnip, cut a turnip, slice it across and put brown sugar, demerara sugar on it and cover it with a basin and let the syrup seep out you know. You had spoonful and going to school, especially winter mornings, we had another lump of sugar, dipped in eucalyptus and you sucked that in your mouth . . . also onions and brown sugar, raw onion sliced off and brown sugar letting the juice go through.

Bill and Joan Welch

Our mother used to talk about children being sewn up for the winter in brown paper. I used to be sewn up in flannel, a sort of cream stuff. I had these flannel poultices they used, yes, I did used to have flannel sort of wrapped round me, not sewn on, pinned on.

Dorothy Barton

Parishes Chemical Food. Everybody knew about Parishes, especially young girls growing up you know, had to have Parishes Chemical Food. Often they used to say they'd make your teeth bad, so it was a good idea to suck it through a straw. I don't know whether people ever did that. It was an iron tonic. You could almost taste the iron in it, you know. It was very strong.

If you had spots in the spring, then you put on sulphur tablets because your blood needed purifying you see.

Bran poultices. My father was a great one for bran poultices. He put one on my foot one day and it was so hot he ended up by burning my foot. For sprains and for things like that he would put bran poultices on. He had a cloth and he'd wring it out hot you see, but he used to put it on a bit too hot sometimes and I ended up, well I had blisters on my feet. It was ordinary bran, you boil it up, boil it up in water.

There was the old camphorated oil. Boiled onions for colds. I remember once when I really had a bad ear, I can't remember what was the matter with it, when I was about 6 or 7, my father boiled a little onion and put it in the ear, but he couldn't get it out again.

There was a thing called Phenemints, that came out when I was about 10 or 11. It was just like chewing gum, and it tasted like Wrigleys chewing gum, looked like Wrigleys chewing gum, but it was a laxative. My brother was away at school, and he came home, I think it was Christmas and we had a friend who was in the market for these things and he'd got us a free sample, you know. My brother thought golly gee, chewing gum . . . and with disastrous consequences.

Margaret Kippen

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HOME CURES FROM ABROAD

Well the main illness was the common cold, and nobody ever went to the doctor for a cold. The first things my mother used to run for were fresh lemons, honey, and serosee. The orange would be juiced, and mixed up with the honey, and a little vinegar and salt and that was shaken up until it all blended. The end result was a sort of syrup, you take a teaspoon of that about three times a day or more.

These things were not drugs so whenever you had a tickly cough coming on you would run for this sweet syrup.

We used to have camphorated oil. That is the ordinary camphor that you would put in areas where clothes were stored to stop the roaches from eating them. The camphor was mixed up with rum and coconut oil and used as a rub. This was used for respiratory complaints. The hands were warmed over a lamp. When the hands were what you would call very hot, then the camphor oil was applied by massage to the chest and back.

For diarrhoea, they made from flour a type of paste, similar to a batter for frying, but only the flour was used, sugar was added while it was being heated. The end result was a thin porridge, they would give you that, or they would put a little flour into a frying pan, until it was brown then make that into a thin porridge. I think a different porridge was used in the latter, but in any case the two methods had the same effect of constipating.

Tuberculosis, or we sometimes called it consumption. At that time young people on the whole used to be so frightened of this disease, because we had this thing built into our brains that if you get a cold and it doesn't clear up quickly, you would get consumption. And you would run a mile if any one was thought to have this disease.

Somebody might just have influenza and you know with influenza you would get a cough, and maybe a slight temperature, and look a bit pale and washed out. Oh, that was the sign of T.B. and you would scare away. You wouldn't talk to that person — you would run a mile.

So it was a scary time when a person was ill with cold symptoms and fever. Naturally you had to call in a doctor, this would be the last resort if the person had not got better after being given all the bush baths as they called them, that was given for fever. Well there was one that I know was used a lot, that would be the leaves of a pimento tree, the leaves of sagem, serosee, and fever grass or lemon grass, and sour sapp leaves. These would be boiled in a very large pot, I remember it had such a pungent smell. Well that is what you would be bathed in, your head would be soaked with bay rum, oh yes lemons would be cut and juiced and all thrown into the bath. Normally you would feel a lot better after these baths.

You would have these baths on most nights of the illness along with the syrup or elixir, and this really helped and one just got better.

It was very rare that you went to the doctor for him to diagnose any particular disease. You just did your own thing, and you got better, but in cases where these things were not helping, you would seek medical aid.

In order to get to a doctor you had to travel about nine miles usually on foot. It would have to be a case of extreme emergency. A person collapses or something like

that. But then it was such a long way for the doctor to come, as well as for you to go, so if the patient can be brought to the doctor, then you would have a better chance. You see the doctor would have so many patients to look after, so if you were to wait until he could make it, you would have a death on your hands instead of a sick person.

Then you would just have to wait your turn. But there was always somebody who controlled the crowd and that person was the dispenser in most cases. Each doctor dispensed his own medicine.

Very often it would be a cart, a mule cart, that would be hired to take you to the doctor. In the better districts you could hire a car. Some people were so far gone before they sought medical aid, that they would reach half way, and then have to turn back because the ill person had died.

There were a few cases in your own family where immediate medical attention was needed.

My brother had attended my aunt's funeral. After the funeral he was staying home for a few days in Kingston and he had this pain in his stomach. It was very peculiar because the whole of his abdomen was aching, not one particular area. So one of our cousins said she would go with him to the doctor. When they both went to the doctor and he was explaining to the doctor how he felt, his cousins interrupted and described his complaint as a stomach ache. The doctor prescribed medication according to how his cousins felt that he felt, and sent him home. After his visit to the doctor, he was sure that if he was home with his mother she would do a better job.

By the time he got home he was in a bad way, and we tried to get him back to the doctor that night, but the car that served the district was fully booked up.

The following morning we got the car and took him to the doctor. We got him there towards evening. The doctor had an appointment, because he was a religious person and had a speaking engagement that night. So he hurriedly gave him a dose of medicine, and almost immediately the pain in his stomach went. In other words he felt much better after the medicine.

The doctor told us that if he didn't continue to improve, we should bring him back. Well we didn't have thermometers, but he did feel warm to touch.

He came back home, he had no pain, he just lay there. He wasn't eating, and my mother noticed that his finger nails were getting blue, and his lips were getting darker, but he wasn't having any pain. So she said, "But Renard, you're not feeling any better," and he said "I am not having any pain Mum."

But Mum decided that she was going to take him back to the doctor because he did say to take him back if he wasn't feeling any better. When she took him back, they admitted him. Another doctor examined him. The doctor told us that he should have had an operation, when he had first come to see the doctor. As things stood an operation would have been pointless because peritonitis had set in. The appendix had burst. He couldn't live.

Mrs. Elsa Nelson

I come from the Ivory Coast which is a French speaking country in West Africa.

Most children there are now born in hospitals; both of my children were.

Although it is nice to have your children in the comfort of your own home, you cannot bring equipment if it is needed for you or the baby. You might start to panic if things go wrong.

Because of the number of people in our country, there are not enough doctors to visit everybody in their homes. There is a big demand for beds. I would prefer to have my children in hospital; supposing you needed a caesarean? You would panic, then the baby might die. If the baby comes suddenly, it may catch you unawares, then you have to have it at home.

In this country if a baby is constipated, then people give it laxatives; at home we give a baby an enema if it has not passed a motion. The sort of food we have to eat can cause a failure of the kidneys and the baby puts on weight and can't go, so we always give an enema after one day of constipation. We also give them warm water and palm oil.

Irene

If your tummy hurts you, we got a little thing back home called sorricy. You boil it and you drink it.

If you have a bad eye, you pick the leaf of life, put it over the fire and then sprinkle it on to your eye, and it will clear up. I'm dying for a piece of leaf of life to squeeze to my eye now, but I can't get it here. They say it's my nerves, but it doesn't matter, because if I could get it, it'd get better. The glasses I've got are no use to me.

If you have a headache, the breadfruit leaf is good. Some people bake it, or you can put it straight on your head. I hear that some people is drinking it now for blood pressure.

Mrs. Brown

The tree of life, similar to a rubber plant, has thick leaves. You would beat the thick leaf and squeeze the juice, mix it with honey and lime. This was good for heavy chest colds.

The chinner mint leaf is thick and full of juice. Mix with bay rum, camphorated oil and make a spice bag. Place the spice bag on chest and back, and this helps to reduce temperature.

Take fresh cut bush, beat it until it becomes soft, and put it on a wound. It heals wounds and stops bleeding fast.

Beetle Nut, is an antidote for poison.

Boiled bread fruit leaf is good for blood pressure.

Sour sap leaf boiled and strained is good for kids still wetting the bed.

Tuna, similar to cactus, it brings back shine to hair.

Mr. McClean

I was a country boy in St. Mary. The country was fruitful and everyone was healthy. Dad grew lots of crops: corn, coca etc. Corn and coca was especially fruitful. Dad used to dry the corn and coca pod and bag them up. They could last for years like that. There was plenty to eat and Dad could always sell his corn, if things went short.

There was a fever back home called growing fever. Usually children from 11-13 years had this growing fever. Mother would always give us a hot bath and medication in the form of bushes, boiled up. This drink was bitter tasting and the main ingredient was aloes. This also purified the blood, and made us eat. We only attended the doctor when something was serious with us.

To heal wonds and sores, we'd use a bark called Baseda. This tree grew like a pear tree. You'd take a chopper and chop some of the bark. The liquid that came from the bark would be used to heal wounds.

Mr. Beckford

I take tonics to try and keep me healthy I try not to call in the doctor.

When I first came here from Jamaica, I brought some herbs with me. Now you can get them from a herbalist in Brixton market. He flies to Jamaica every now and then to stock up with more herbs.

I always drink a bush tea to keep generally healthy, I never drink ordianry tea or coffee.

Recipes. Cerrise bush — this is for use in any sickness. It has a very bitter taste and you should boil it with ginger and orange peel.

Black mint — for use in the case of vomiting.

Peppermint — for a tummy ache.

Rice bitters — for use during a billious attack.

Ginger — for tummy aches and also for warmth in the winter.

Ram goat dash-along tea — for any sickness.

Dandy weed — for colds.

Search-me-heart — for a fresh cold.

Bitterwood — good for billious attacks and also if you boil little chips of it, it is good for your blood.

Tonics — Guinness and saspirilla; Mackeson with brandy; make a punch using Sanatogen with egg and orange, beat it up and sprinkle with nutmeg.

Gina

In the old days in the country side, midwives were not trained specially so maybe the grandmother took charge and delivered babies. If there was a problem with the birth, you had to attend a clinic. There was a clinic in Linstead, St. Catherine Jamaica, there was a clinic in Point Hill also.

If you had a cold you made up a medicine yourself. Cold bush and serosee mixed with lime, boil it up, strain it and drink it straight away. Serosee is a leaf and it grows like a vine. It has a red berry, but it is the leaf that is needed for boiling. Cold bush is almost the same as the mint bush over here.

Another method is with grapefruit or oranges, whichever you choose makes no difference, bake the fruit until soft, take out the middle and mix with honey that has come straight from the honey comb. This cuts colds.

The liquor from young coca pods was good for sores and cuts. It sealed wounds.

For headaches, bay rum was used. You'd rub the head and forehead with it. It can also be bought in this country. Something similar to this is McKenzies smelling salts, a very harsh smell but very good for headaches.

Mr. Lewis

Mum and Dad joined the HSA, the Hospital Savings Association. You had to have at least twelve months at work before you got sick pay. If you were like we were, still at home, Mum and Dad were keeping me and they could claim for us, so that helps with the finances doesn't it, and for extra travelling or anything else. It's been going for years. Mum and Dad found it handy, you know, so I joined as well.

They used to stop it out of your wages when you were at work, and when I left the firm I asked about the HSA, and he said, "You'll have to keep in touch with them and pay it yourself if you want to still stay on." I said, "Yes I want to stay on because this is the time you want it; more now than you did when you were younger, because you never know when you get older, you might have to go into hospital."

You get help towards glasses and dentures and then so much a day if you're in hospital. We've both had glasses recently, two new pairs of glasses. If you should be unlucky enough to spend a spell in hospital you get a payment which does help you know with expenses, extra expenses while you're in there.

Bill and Joan Welch

Just after the first world war. I was about 14 when I first knew of the existence of the HSA, the Hospital Savings Association, because my father worked for W. H. Smith & Sons and they were part instigators of the HSA. It started at 3d a week and W. H. Smith & Sons were one of the first groups that formed, and they used to pay a 1d, it was 3d a week, then they used to pay 1d a week themselves. Anytime you were going into hospital you went and saw your Group Secretary, and he gave you a letter to take in, because in those days when you went into hospital they took particulars of what you could afford to pay. If you took an HSA letter you paid nothing. I believe the HSA in those days used to allow about 4 guineas a week to the hospital, which was quite a lot of money in those days.

It became a terrific thing, this HSA. It had the whole of the Police Force in it. It was sixpence a week when I'm talking about it, and they had it taken off their wages. For each division they had a Group Secretary and he just gave in monthly returns of anybody who'd had hospital treatment.

But in 1948 when the Health Service was introduced, the HSA fell away completely. It gradually dropped and nobody wanted to be in it as they were getting the hospital treatment free anyway. Before that though, I think most firms had it. But even if the firms didn't have it, you had blokes in the firm, like union officials who'd take the money, like I used to. I had two groups; one most of them were ex-policemen who'd left the job, and couldn't have it taken out of their wages, and the other was policeman who had it taken out of their wages. I used to collect their money and just send and deduct postage, because that's how they were able to do it. They just had a few officers, north, south, east and west. The rest of their work was done by voluntary people like me. Consequently, no wages to pay, that's why they were able to flourish. If they'd had to pay for all their Group Secretaries they'd never have been able to manage, not on sixpence a week.

I was on the Isle of Dogs for twenty years, at a small police station and I was one of these blokes that took on everything. I was a first aid instructor, I was a librarian, I was on these committees, HSA Secretary, everything that was going.

Prior to this war, we never had to pay National Insurance, we paid our own doctors and we (police) had our own hospital. The Metropolitan Police Force had a ward in St. Thomas's Hospital, which they paid for and they had their own divisional doctors which they paid for.

We didn't pay National Insurance, but when the boys left the police force and went into the army, they had to pay National Insurance. Army personnel always had to pay National Insurance. The police force were the only people who didn't pay. When 1948 came along and the new National Health started, everybody had to be in it, police, army the lot. When this new National Health came out, it embraced everything eyes, ears, teeth, hospitals the lot, so it was an entirely different thing.

Yes, I can remember the HSA far back when I was about 13 or 14, my dad was in it and I remember I had to have an operation on my nose. I got this letter from the HSA, went down the Royal Free Hospital and saw the almoner. It was so new she never knew what it was all about. I can remember her saying to me, "What does this mean? That you don't have to pay anything?" I said, "I don't know. I was told to come". She let me go and I never did have that operation on my nose. It's still broken. They never sent for me anymore. I suppose she thought, "He ain't gonna pay." The HSA was so little known then, but later on the first thing they asked you when you went into hospital was: "Belong to the HSA?"

Ken Ballantyne

Dad being the wage earner, didn't get paid when he was sick, and so they belonged to one of these Friendly Societies. Then when he was sick, the Friendly Society brought his money up to what his wages would have been if he were at work. He didn't have a very strong chest so he always had about a fortnight off every winter. I don't mean he was a malingerer you know. Really genuinely he did either have flu or a bad cold or a bit of bronchitis or something, but he was never off sick very long. My sister and I had to go and pay it. We hated that; we didn't like the man we paid the money to you see.

This is all before the HSA. I never heard about the HSA until I came to London. The doctors themselves used to run little arrangements where families paid sixpence a week or a shilling a week actually to the doctor and he would keep a record of this and treat them you know. They would pay it all the year round, and he would treat them when they were ill. But you know they treated lots of people without payment. They were really marvellous in those days. They didn't demand payment, or they would say, "That's alright, pay me when you can." I don't think they ever went short of a turkey at Christmas, you know, that sort of thing.

Alice Minett

INFECTIOUS DISEASES

My sister got diphtheria. I've got twin sisters, and one of them caught diphtheria.

Doctor Clements came round and he took a swab from her throat. He took that back to his surgery for examination and then he came round again, because there was no phones in those days, people weren't on the phone in those days. He came and said, "I'm afraid it's diphtheria. She'll have to go away to this hospital. I've made arrangements." I know she went in an ambulance. He tested my other sister because they used to sleep together in the same room, like in the bed, and he tested her and she was all right. So far, so good. And then they had to fumigate the room, just that bedroom, seal it off and got one of those candles going, a sulphur candle to fumigate the room. And you can't go in that room any more, not until it's all clear. That's what you used to have to do. And they took all the books, toys, everything away, and blankets, because the blankets used to come back yellow didn't they.

I was only fourteen myself and I was on this bread round selling bread to the public. The doctor examined me, and said, "No you'll be all right. You can still go to work." There was a woman, she was selling raffle tickets and she said to me, "Do you want a raffle ticket baker?" and I said, "What's it for?" She said, "A doll". And there was a big doll you know, beautiful doll, especially for those days, you didn't get dolls like that, you know, like you can today, not in those days. So I said "How much are those?" She said they were sixpence a ticket, so I said, "I'll have a ticket." And lo and behold, I won it and I was going to take it into my sister, Daphne, the one that was in hospital. And mum said, "No, if it goes in there she can't bring it out. If it goes in the fever hospital you can't bring them out." She said, "Leave it here till she comes home." She had it when she came home.

When we went to visit at the hospital, you could see her through the glass like, from the outside, until she got over it and they moved her to another ward. Then you could go and visit her. That's right, you just waved from there.

Bill Welch

Scarlet Fever.

951 persons were notified as suffering from this disease during the year under report as compared with a total of 747 for the previous year. Included in this total are 17 nurses on the staff of the South-Eastern Hospital, and also 10 patients who, after removal to hospital, were certified to be not suffering from the disease in question.

There were 13 deaths as compared with 2, 9 and 3 in the three preceding years.

Diphtheria.

The total number of patients certified to be suffering from Diphtheria was 363 as compared with a total of 315 for the previous year. Of this number 19 were errors of diagnosis, and 22 were nurses on the staff of the South-Eastern Hospital.

There were 13 deaths as compared with 21, 16 and 12 for the three preceding years.



Ruth, left, with her hair cropped

The first thing they did to me when I went in the Brook Hospital with scarlet fever was to cut all my hair off, because they said my hair took all my strength. So that was the regular thing they did to the patients, and I gradually got better there, till they sent me down to Darenth to a convalescent home where I contracted diphtheria. Also they used to have coats hanging in the cloakroom with hoods which we had to wear when we went out into the grounds. Well, through wearing one of those I contracted ringworm, so all in all it was five months and a fortnight before I returned home. Now that was my first experience of illness.

My second son was 14 years old and he went down to the doctor's one evening. I was running the Labour Party Committee Room in my house and he complained of a bad throat — came home from school in the afternoon — he went down to the doctor's on the Saturday evening with my husband and they took him away from the surgery with diphtheria.

They closed the surgery, put him in an ambulance and took him straight to Hither Green Hospital with diphtheria, and that was the only time I remember my children being in hospital when they were little. I was terribly upset. Of course they had to close the committee room; they had to take everything away the next morning. I wasn't allowed anything and it had to be fumigated. I was so upset I never went to the hospital to see him because I knew I would break down and I didn't want to do that. So my husband went and my eldest son went. He was away about seven weeks and he grew four inches in height in those seven weeks. But he's been well since; he's still alive.

I was five years old, and hadn't been to school long, and I can remember going out of the back entrance of Guys Hospital in a brown ambulance, and I can remember looking up at the window and seeing my mother there, crying her eyes out. I was taken into Hither Green — I can remember lying flat with all these swabs going up my nose and it was hell. That's all I remember of diphtheria — the nasal drip. If you had it in the throat they'd cut you. But I didn't have that. There was no inoculation in those days; you had to get on with it.

Molly

When you had ringworm, you were taken to a hospital nearby. And I can remember what they did. You lay on a bed, with your head propped up, and there was a ray playing on your head. I don't know how long for, for about ten minutes, quarter of an hour, something like that. Then the nurse comes along with a towel. Bingo and you're bald. It just fetched all your hair out. They just rubbed it off. You don't feel it coming out. It just comes off. I think the ray just burned it off, but it don't burn the roots. But if it's on too long it will burn the roots. That's what happened to me, burned the roots on one side. They just dressed the ringworms you know. You don't have it for long.

Then they decided to provide wigs, we used to call them wiglets. It was five or six weeks before it grew back. Your hair never came back to what it naturally was. I had nice curly hair. It never came back to that any more. We had a chap by the name of Jones who came in the hospital with me. He had it done — all he had was two side pieces, he was completely bald for the rest of his life. They gave him a wig, a ridiculous wig.

Harry Read

I had diphtheria as a child. I was sent to Hither Green Hospital. I was very ill and they think that's what left the kidneys weak. It was terrible really. I was in hospital for quite a long time. There were several children up the road who caught it, and they were trying to find a carrier. They said there was a carrier about and they did find her in the end; a foreigner. They really thought I was going to go you know with the diphtheria.

They found all this diphtheria had left me weak, so I had to wear these leg irons. I was in Bayland Street Hospital and they were ever so kind. They use to take all of us children in those old-fashioned wheelchairs through the gardens, they'd lovely gardens, and mulberry bushes, you know. It used to be lovely there.

Nellie Carroll

There were fever boats somewhere round about Woolwich. There were half a dozen as far as I can remember and they were moored off the shore. People had scarlet fever, diphtheria, things like that. I gathered from what my mother said that they were sort of barges. Mum worked there for some time. She had to stay there for some months at a time and live on board. Apparently she caught something. I don't know what it was — scarlet fever I think — and after she'd been nursed there on the boat she had to leave because they wouldn't have her back.

Dorothy Barton

LCC Horse Ambulances



I had to see my brother through glass. We used to go on Sunday School outings, and one Whit Monday, he complained of a pain in his ankle. We were all laughing about with the boys and he fell down and he wouldn't get up. We thought he was larking about but in the end we had to practically carry him home, bring him home. We rushed him to St. Nicholas Hospital with rheumatic fever and he was in isolation there. And it was in a long corridor and the glass window went right along at the end of the beds. You looked through the glass to the beds. I remember the man my brother was friendly with in the next bed, he was deaf and dumb and Eric learnt the deaf and dumb language and he was telling him what we were saying out there and it used to upset me. I used to cry when I went in, when I couldn't go in and see him. He was in there a long time, and then he went to Carshalton Convalescent Hospital.

Joan Welch

Scarlet fever, I was about six or seven and I remember lying in the back room on a very beautiful sunny day like this, and the doctor calling. I can't really remember that I was ever feeling ill, to be quite honest. I can remember I could hear the children playing out in the street and wanting to be out there, but I wasn't allowed to get up. And then sometime in the afternoon, it seemed a long time to me, an ambulance called and I was taken to the Brook Hospital, because that was the hospital for scarlet fever and diphtheria in those days.

I remember being put in an isolation ward, a small ante-room off of the main ward. They were huge wards, or they seemed huge to me. And the ceiling seemed miles away. But being isolated, I remember crying. And then I wanted to go to the toilet to make water really. I kept banging on the glass panel and no nurse came and I had a fear of wetting the bed. And anyway I don't know how many days I was in isolation, you had to wear white gowns. Apparently as a kid I had a nice head of blonde hair and I remember sitting up in bed and this big nurse cutting my hair with clippers. And that upset me and started me off crying and some of the patients got fed up with me.

Anyway, I remember getting up and the nurses taking us out for a walk. And the grass seemed ever so high to me because I wasn't very big. Coming back, the nurse walking me round the ground stopped and pointed to the water tower and said, "That's where we put naughty boys." I thought that was very unkind, because I was very homesick. And then I was taken from hospital, goodness knows where, to a convalescent home. I remember this rather large charabanc taking us somewhere and feeling very unhappy and I remember looking forward to the day when we were going back home. We were sitting in the coach, I know we were coming through a town, it may have been somewhere in London, and all the children were singing a song: "Mother will you take me home from this convalescent home?" I forget the rest. I was so happy to be home, and that was my first experience of hospital.

Arthur Wellard.

St. George's Dispensary, Powick Street, 1914





Mount Vernon Hospital — Children's Christmas

I remember when I was about twelve, I felt very ill. I had scarlet fever. And in those days all the beds had to be taken away and stoved and my mother didn't want her bed to be mixed up with everybody's else, so eventually I remember hearing my father say, "I think you'll have to get the doctor." And when she came, she found all this rash around my throat and she said, "What's this? I think you've got scarlet fever." And my mother said, "Oh no she hasn't. That rash is from where I put a vinegar and oatmeal poultice round her neck. No she hasn't got scarlet fever." And the doctor accepted this. And I don't know how much she had to pay her, but she accepted what my mother had said and I got better myself. In actual fact I did have scarlet fever.

The beds would have been taken away and I think I would have been taken to hospital, because at that point it seemed as if the ambulance was coming round for all sorts of things.

It was like a diphtheria. And you were just taken away to the hospitals and that was that.

My mother didn't want her beds taken away. I think she was more concerned about the beds, that they would be mixed up and she might not get the clean one back. They were taken away and stoved. That means they were put in heat treatment to kill the germs.

May Wellard

My brother was sent down to Joyce Green Hospital with scarlet fever and he caught German measles down there. He was in hospital for six weeks and when he came home he was like a little Billy Bunter. I can always remember when he came home, he had his cap stuck on the top of his head, and his coat was too short. He'd been away at Christmas time, but we'd got all his presents there. Dad had brought him a fairy cycle and there he was riding round and round on this cycle with this little cap on top.

I went away with a fever. I went to Hither Green, and I was away for a fortnight, they gave me injections and they propped up the bed.

Mum and dad used to write letters and if they read them to me, I used to cry all night, so they wouldn't read them to me.

Visitors wasn't allowed in. But my dad used to come up every other night on his bike, snow and what have you, and leave a parcel at the gate for me, and when I came home my Uncle Bill had made me a beautiful shop, and it had everything in it, all greengrocery, and cheese, and of course I thought it was real cheese and ate a piece and it was white soap. The shop was all lit up as well, and he'd made it while I was in hospital.

Joan Tyrrell

WORKHOUSE

If a man couldn't get a job he'd go round to the R.O., it used to be Mary Anne's buildings, to see the Relieving Officer. His name was Mr. Abbot and he was a very hard man. If he thought that a man didn't want to find work, he'd say, "Oh well you can't find work, so you and your wife will have to go in the workhouse." The father went one place, the mother the other and the children somewhere else.

The only time I can remember which I thought was very bad, was before they modernised Greenwich District Hospital. They did have what they called the workhouse parts and anybody who went into hospital and they didn't have anything they were put in this workhouse part. I went there once and it made me ill. My dad was in hospital and he knew an old man from Ireland and he was living in a lodging house and my mum used to give him his dinner every Sunday, whatever we had, we never had a lot. He went into hospital the same time as my dad and he was in there and we used to go in there now and again and take him in some tobacco.

We went in one Sunday and we said to my dad, "Where is Mr. Fitzgerald?" and he said, "They've moved him, they've moved him over to the workhouse side." So I said to my sister, "We'll go and take him over some tobacco." And we went through these wards, and up the sides of these wards were these things like cradles to keep the old people in. All their hair was matted you know, oh it was terrible. They weren't looked after; they were just lying there and calling out and that, and we didn't stop.

We just walked through and saw it and we came away. We didn't tell my dad because it would have upset him. The middle was just enough to get through, they were just lying there. I suppose they did as much as they could in those days but there was not a lot of caring.

Jane Birkett

My Grandfather was old, then, because he got ill, they moved him to Constance Road workhouse. I used to go and see him in Constance Road. He died there aged 91. There's one good thing about it, they were kept clean, when they was in the workhouse, they was always kept respectable.

I'm sure he was grateful for it because they used to have nice suits, and they were kept clean. They could go out if they were able, and he used to come down to see me. I always used to have a parcel for him to take back to help him on his way. I used to make him cakes and sandwiches. That used to help him.

There was a room where they could sit and read. Of course they'd just have bare boards and that, not like it is today. But he was quite, you know, contented about it. He was a good age, and he was past working.

He used to come down to my house, of a Sunday morning, for his walk. I always used to have something ready for him to take back. Then when he couldn't come, I used to go to see him.

Florence Childs

Poplar Workhouse



We had an old cook with us for very many years and she got too old to work. She was really part of the family. She was an old Devonshire lady who came up to London with her husband many years before to seek work I suppose, as there wasn't any farm work. She had a sort of dignity and air about her. We all loved her dearly and she was know very affectionately as "old cook". She lived in and then she became too old to do anything really so my father and mother found her a small bed sitter nearby. Well, she got to the state of loneliness and she went to the local for company and I suppose she sometimes got a bit drunk. She didn't look after herself. After a great deal of heart-searching, she had to go into the workhouse at Woolwich.

They were allowed out once a week. On her day out she came over here and spent the day with us. She had her meals with us on those days and mother made it her business to be there. She used to do a bit of dusting or something and then we used to give her her tea and see her on the bus and give her a bit of cake or something to take back with her. The poor old girl eventually died and father had to attend to the necessary. She's buried in Charlton cemetery next to her husband.

Vivian Prince

I remember when I was quite young seeing the old men walking about in the hospital. They used to have the uniform; a grey hat and grey suit of rough material, kind of

rough serge. They used to be all walking around Plumstead High Street and Lakedale Road, picking up cigarette ends. They all seemed to be short men walking about so you could always pick them out.

All those Hospitals they were forbidding looking places. I remember St. Nicks being like that: stone floors and long forms you sat on. Mum's mother was taken up there dying and Mum had to sit there waiting, waiting for news and always being cold.

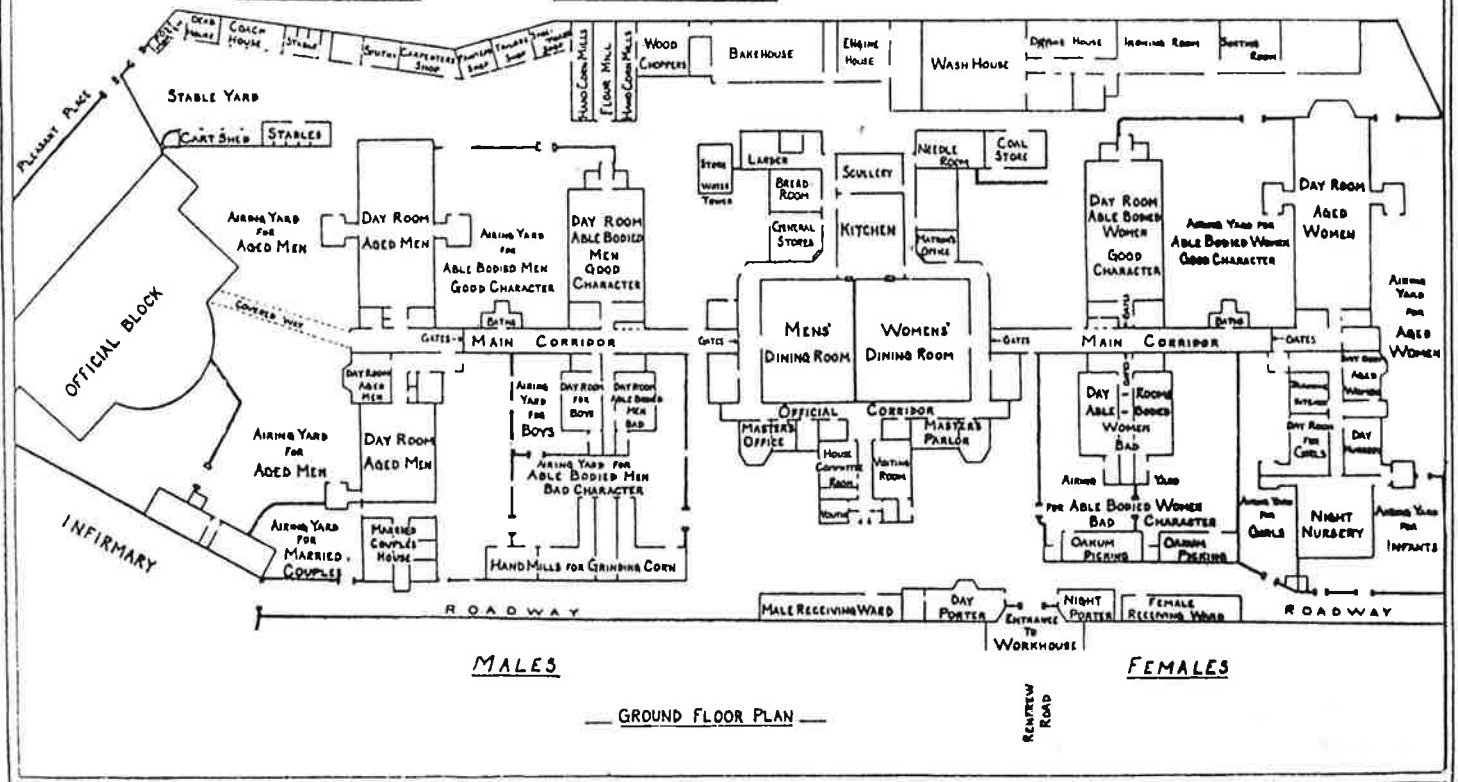
Joan Welch

I used to see the inmates of the workhouse. They were all recognised by the suits they wore, brown tweed old things, and they had proper boots that laced up. Poor old men. I think they were given two bob a week or a shilling a week and half an ounce of tobacco to last the week. These were all old men. You would always see them in Westmorland Road. The old women were in there too, in like a hospital part. I can see them all now, walking around the gardens. But they had absolutely nothing, because they wouldn't have been in there otherwise. They were looked after to a certain extent, but they were there to die. And they had a couple of insane people there too. All in the same building. They used to sit on old forms, with the brown painted walls.

Molly



Lambeth Workhouse: — RENFREW ROAD... As Extended:



As a child, I was sent to a home in Sidcup because my mother could not afford to keep us. You had to go into the workhouse for a fortnight first, to make sure you were clean and proper. And I can remember the old boys in there. They used to wear these old fashioned gym shoes, well they used to wear boots like that. I used to run errands for them. And it was pitiful in there, I might tell you in the old workhouse. They were mostly elderly people.

They used to wear a suit, everybody wore the same. When they were out you knew who they were. I thought that was terrible, all wrong.

In later life I was a member of the Earl of Northampton's charity. Their Home is down by the river, on a pier, round the Generating Station, round the back there. When I went down there for the first time, the Secretary or the Warden referred to Poorman so and so, and every time they referred to that person it was Poorman so and so. That really annoyed me. So one day I said, Mr. Chairman — the Chairman was the very Rev. Higgins of Christ Church at that time — I said, "Mr. Chairman, may I remind you that I'm a poor man, and if anybody addresses me as Mr. Poorman I shall come for him, straight in the face." I said, "I think it's soul-destroying to call any person coming into these homes, through no fault of their own — they've met with bad times — to be Poorman so and so. I'd like to move that we dispense with that disgraceful image and call them Mr. So and So or Mr. Smith, or whatever it may be." "Well, Mr. Read if we do that we shall have to go to the Trinity House because we're run by the Trinity House, up town. The Chairman would have to go there." I said, "Well fair enough, we'll go up there." We met all the big shots up there. I shook one bloke by the hand and said, "Pleased to meet you Mr. Richman So and So." He looked at me. I said, "Don't you like being called Mr. Richman? Because you don't hesitate to call your inmates Mr. Poorman." Anyway we got round the table even-

tually. And I stood up and had a go. I said, "Do you know one of these people just come in this hospital was a naval officer at the Naval College? He's not a poor man. He's an unfortunate man, and if you was to call him Mr. Unfortunate man Mr. Smith rather than Mr. Poorman . . ." Anyway they decided to do away with that.

Harry Read

POOR LAW INMATE'S TOBACCO RATIONS.

TRAFFIC IN HIGH STREET, DEPTFORD.

A Poor Law inmate who, on his own confession, came out of the Gordon-road Camberwell, Institution, last Saturday week with 60 ounces of tobacco collected from the rations of his fellow inmates, stood in the dock at Greenwich, yesterday, charged with selling the tobacco without a licence. The man, Charles Franklin (68), a compositor by trade, was originally charged with having 25 ounces of twist tobacco, supposed to have been stolen or unlawfully obtained, in High-street, Deptford, but on the magistrate's instructions that charge was withdrawn, and he was remanded until yesterday to answer a charge of illegal selling.

Because my father was the Chairman of the Board of Guardians, we'd go round to the workhouse on Christmas Day and see if the old people had any Christmas dinner. That was the only time the husbands and wives had a meal together. It was more like a prison because they were separated off, and it had big old iron gates. They didn't make it very comfortable. It had painted brick walls and plenty of iron gates. And benches, of course. Tables were very bare, and the people sat at them and that was that. The walls were probably green, they usually used green you see, that was a working colour and wasn't too bright for them you know, and not too dark.

Of course you knew them because they had these workhouse suits on, plain grey sort of a suit. You know the workhouse lads had terrible suits made of a sort of drab grey material and they didn't fit very well either.



The workhouse, they turned part of it into a hospital didn't they, the Infirmary? It stood empty for a while, then they made it into what was called a Rest Centre for the homeless, and all the problem families were there.

Mr. Gorman

The inmates were gradually farmed out. It wasn't just one day, "Out you go, go on." I think it must have been run down you see, because some of the people were very old, and perhaps stayed on in the Infirmary there. They changed the name to St. Nicholas Hospital, but it was the old Infirmary, kept and I suppose some of the old people who couldn't go, were kept there you see. Yes, we look back and say, "What a terrible thing!" It wasn't in those days, because you see when they got too old and they'd got no family, or the family couldn't keep them, they had nothing else.

Oh yes they did certain tasks, yes I assume a lot of them kept the place clean, but as I say mainly they were very old people who couldn't do much work anyway.

Dr. & Mr. Gorman

When I began in medical practice I used to send most of my patients to London. Most of the people in Woolwich used to go to Guys. Then after that they would go to the Miller Hospital at Greenwich, but those were the two hospitals that were used. The others were all infirmaries or Poor Law Hospitals, St. Nicholas and all those places. After 1929 they all became general hospitals, but before that they were all Poor Law Hospitals.

They had to take anybody you sent, but you would be told, "Doctor, I'd rather die on the steps than go into the Infirmary". So we might send them to Guys or to the Miller.

They gradually became more acceptable as they were upgraded. In the old days in the infirmary there was usually only one medical officer you see who did everything, and was appointed for life. There was a famous Doctor Bolter at the Woolwich Infirmary who was appointed in 1883 and who was there till 1929.

There were many people with strokes and there was very little rehabilitation. There were rows and rows of people with strokes, and I suppose all chronic things that could not be managed at home.

The LCC took them all over and they gave them all names. There was St. Olaves and St. Nicholas and St. Charles and St. Mary's instead of being the Plumstead Infirmary or the Lewisham Infirmary or the Rotherhithe Infirmary and they gradually built up their own medical service. They began to appoint their own specialists and by the time the war came, they had a sort of alternative medical service. Otherwise all the hospitals were voluntary hospitals, supported by donations and subscriptions.

Dr. John Greatrex

My father was Manager of lots of Hospital Boards, so in my youth I went round to St. Nichols Hospital, Brook, Joyce Green all over the place with him.

I remember as a child going to St. Nicholas which was the workhouse on Christmas Day with my father and seeing the inmates having pork and beer. There was one man there who, if you gave him two shillings he would wriggle it from his eye right down to his hand, and then he kept it. If he dropped it he lost his money. He could do that you see, and by his skill he got his two shilling piece or half a crown. Of course for those people it was a fortune.

The men were separate from the women. My Christmas morning was always spent going round the local institutions, hospitals, the Hospital for Mothers and Babies and St. Nicholas and just on round, all these little Cottage Hospitals which have now all gone.

Dr. Gorman

Because I was homeless they sent me over to Westmoreland Lodge, Westmorland Road between the Elephant and Castle and Camberwell. Well, it was like something out of Charles Dickens with the gates you had to go through. My husband was told he couldn't come no further than the gates and that was that, that there were certain times when he could visit and I would be told what the cost of it was to keep me there, and we were shown in. I was pregnant at the time as well, and I'd already got some children. They were put into Ladywell Nursery in residential care and I entered then into this institution.

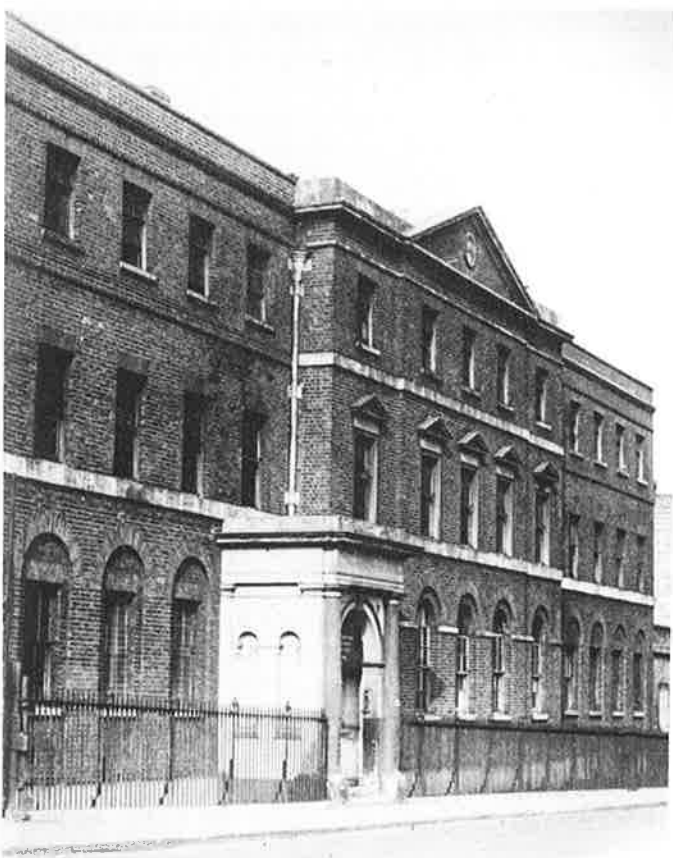
Well I cried because I'd never seen anything like it in my life. All the flooring was stone and I was put into one great big dormitory with all other people there that was homeless, and I was told we'd rise at 7 in the morning and we'd have breakfast at 8 and we had to do a certain amount of work. We had to do our own cleaning.

It was a workhouse; it wasn't a hospital. Then they decided to decorate the dormitory, and the only room they had for us all to go to was over the other side of the building which was a hospital ward for geriatric, very aged people. And of course some of them there had gone right back to their second childhood. They couldn't get out of bed.

Mind you, the staff there were marvellous, especially to the aged, and sometimes I used to go in to some of them that could remember, and I used to do some errands for them. I would run to the shops for them and I was told by the Sister, "No cigarettes for them and no snuff, but you can buy them sweets." They found out I was pregnant and between them they bought me a little dress for the baby which they gave me.

Rosie Dale

Poplar Workhouse



We were in the WVS and we had a workhouse here just off Garrett Lane in Wandsworth. We were asked to start an old people's club within the workhouse because you couldn't get these people out. It was around 1959-60 and it was still a workhouse and the conditions were deplorable.

Well the place was absolutely stark of furniture with the barest of everything and the men's dormitories had about 20 beds, and no privacy, nowhere to keep their clothes. It was all in boxes or little cases underneath their beds. They had no way of ever keeping anything private. The women's quarters were almost as bad. There were a few more toilet facilities but the urinal smell was dreadful and they were all dressed in the drabest of clothes and it must have made them feel degraded to start off with, putting them into drab clothes. They either stayed in their beds or slept on top of the beds. Nothing was going on for them and it was such a drab existence.

Then somebody had the idea of starting an old peoples' club within the workhouse. My friend and I got the job, so we started it off. We had to go first of all and get the old men out of the dormitory, put their boots on and dress them, to encourage them to come down to play Bingo or to have music and do a bit of singing. We did it once a week. Well gradually we built the club up, but every time we left that place, we'd come out and we'd get as far as the low brick wall and we'd both sit there with tears streaming down our faces. People coming by would say, "What's wrong. Can we help you?" And we would feel so foolish there crying our eyes out at what we'd left behind, what we'd come away from, and that there was nothing we could do about it, the conditions in there.

It happened every week, and my husband said, "I think you'd better find yourself another job. It's getting to you." But we didn't give up. We kept it going until the workhouse was taken away, and that was it. They found them other accommodation. But that was an experience I wouldn't want anyone to go through again, because you said to yourself, "How could anyone put their mother or father away in the workhouse like that?" At that time there was probably nowhere else to put them. But the conditions they were put away under, and that was good to what it used to be.

My mother had a friend she had to enter the workhouse because all her family had died off and she was left alone. The ladies at that time wore white aprons like a cook's white apron and a white mob cap. They were all identical. I must have been about six. I know I said, "Don't ever let me go there will you mum? You don't want to go there, do you?"

Again I think it was a shock to me at that age to see people herded together. I had a lovely childhood and home life, and coming out of that and going into something like that . . . There was an old iron staircase to climb up and everything was grey and drab and all these little old ladies were sitting there all dressed the same. They could have been effigies sitting around doing nothing.

Olly Hollingsworth

HOSPITAL TREATMENT

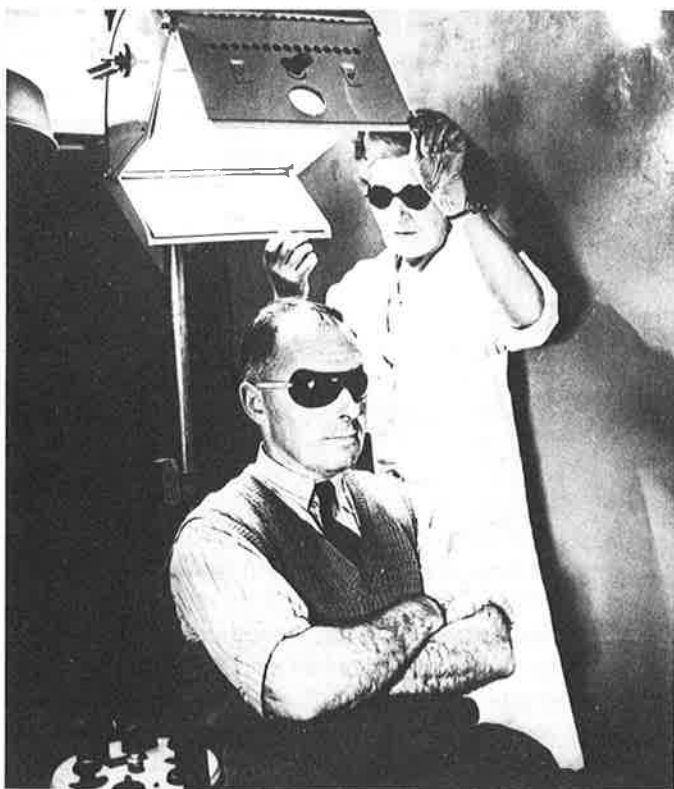
I remember my gran going into hospital for treatment for glaucoma. Glaucoma is a build-up of pressure at the back of the eyes, so they used leeches to draw the blood and reduce the pressure. The treatment did work with Gran. I seem to remember there was blood, and I think this was one of the things that I was always a bit scared of when I was younger, you know anything like that. It looked pretty horrible to me and it was a horrible hospital. It looked like a real workhouse, with typical old fashioned iron bedsteads and very cold looking, not like they are now. These were just long wards, whereas now they've got all those sections so that its about four of you to a ward and it's more like a hotel.

Joan Welch

My hair started to come out. I never had a lot of hair when I was a kid and the doctor advised my mother to take me to the hospital to see a specialist. There I used to go under the lamp, they used to put my head in the lamp like a hairdryer, you know in the hairdresser.

My mother used to take me up there on the tram once a week every week for this treatment for alopecia but it didn't do a lot of good, did it?

Bill Welch



Patient receiving ultra-violet treatment for thinning hair

In hospital the beds were very high I remember, and of course there was prayers every morning. And there was all this business about the wards being tidy and no mess on your locker and that sort of thing. You had to sit up, especially during the doctor's rounds. The nurses did more of the domestic work then too.

Margaret Kippen

The diphtheria I had as a child left me very weak, and they put me in leg irons to support me. One day we was at the hospital and there was a lady there, a well spoken lady, and it turned out that she was to do with charity. She came down to see Mum. She wanted Mum to go up to, I think it must have been Earls Court or Westminster. There was a big service there, a healing service. Of course I'd got these irons on my legs, but Mum said, "Don't worry we'll go anyway." So she met us, we went in a taxi and everything. We thought it was lovely. And there was a huge crowd of people there. We all went down one at a time. When we got to the door to come out, Mum said, "What's the matter?" I said, "These irons have come off. They just fell off." And I couldn't make it out. So we went into a shop and got a ball of string to tie them up. So of course when I got to the hospital, the doctor said, "You've broken these." I said, "I haven't broken them." "Well," he said, "You'll have to keep them on another week. I said "Well they won't keep on." I told him what had happened. So they were puzzled. And when I got back next week they said, "Leave them off." They built my shoes up and I never wore the leg irons again after that. Something must have happened that day.

Nellie Carroll

In those days we didn't wear any stockings sometimes, and when I was about seventeen, I bought these shoes that were like a basket shoe and it's a hot day. I put the shoes on and they must have been a bit tight so I get this blister and I didn't take no notice of it. I went as bridesmaid to a girl and I bought these white shoes and I've gone to the wedding, come back in the night, and couldn't get me shoe on after I'd taken it off. My foot was all swollen up. When I looked, this thing had come up and it had about six yellow heads on it. It was horrible, so we went to the hospital and they said I'd have to go to the Miller, so I went to the Miller. It was all inflamed up me leg, so the nurse said "You mustn't put it to the ground, because if it goes as far as your knee you'll lose your leg." So I had to lay in bed. All they done, they used a lot of what we called black jack, it was like a black treacle.

Well I had to get a certificate otherwise I would have lost me job, working in Lyons, so I went up to a doctor we had at New Cross, Doctor Lindsey. He was a German and a lovely man and he said to me, "What's up?" I told him I wanted a certificate for work. He said, "My goodness, whatever have you done? Wash all that off." So I washed all the stuff off — the black jack — and he lanced it for me and my mum got that better and you know what took all that poison out? It was stuff called slippery elm and it was a sort of a jelly stuff and you made it up — it was really a stick but you had to pulp it. In fact a lot of women used to use it for abortions.

They used to have sort of mauve stuff if anyone had sores — genetian violet and they used to paint it on, because in those days some of the children used to get impetigo and it was very nasty. There was a lot of sore eyes as well. You used to have to go to the clinic right opposite Rachel MacMillian Nursery and they used to put like a yellowy ointment on the eyes for people.

There was a babies hospital in Albury Street, Deptford and it was just two rooms, No. 34 and 36 Albury Street and it was two houses but you could get from one house to the other; converted they were. They had it as a babies hospital, and we had a matron who used to be in charge. If the children in the street hurt themselves at all we used to go to her and she'd say alright she'd do it for us, but I know once we were playing netball and we had a great big iron and we were rolling it away and this girl let it go and it went back on my toe and so of course me foot all come up. My mum said, "You'd better go over to the matron." When I went into her she said, "I'm sorry Jane I can't do anything for you, you'll have to go to the hospital." So I went down the Miller and them days you didn't get a plaster you got a wooden splint and then they bandaged that all round just to keep your feet stable, so that's what they gave me, I had that for about 3 months and a pair of crutches.

They took in tiny babies who had bronchitis or whooping cough. It was run by the health authorities at the time. They had ladies like Rachel Macmillan and Lady Florence, and they sort of helped in funds. You used to put something in the box, whatever you could afford.

I know there was a matron, an assistant and then about six nurses and about 20 beds. But when the old Albany was there sometimes they used to put the babies in the grounds, on a warm afternoon, you could see the cots in the grounds from where we lived.

I remember Hospital Sundays. Well people used to dress up and it used to be like a fiesta. All different shop keepers used to have their floats, and that used to be

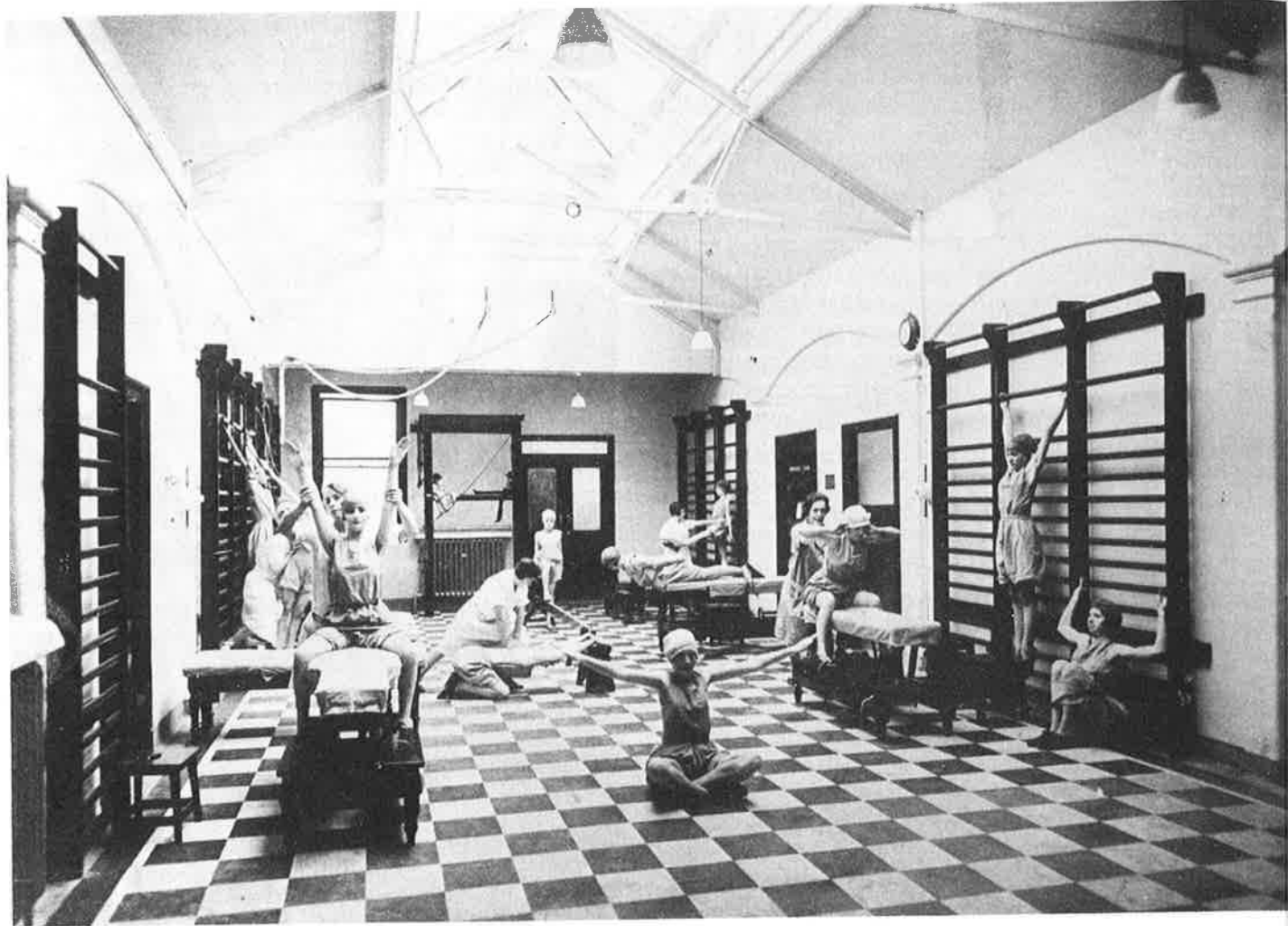
Deptford Babies Hospital 1911



Grange Road Centre.

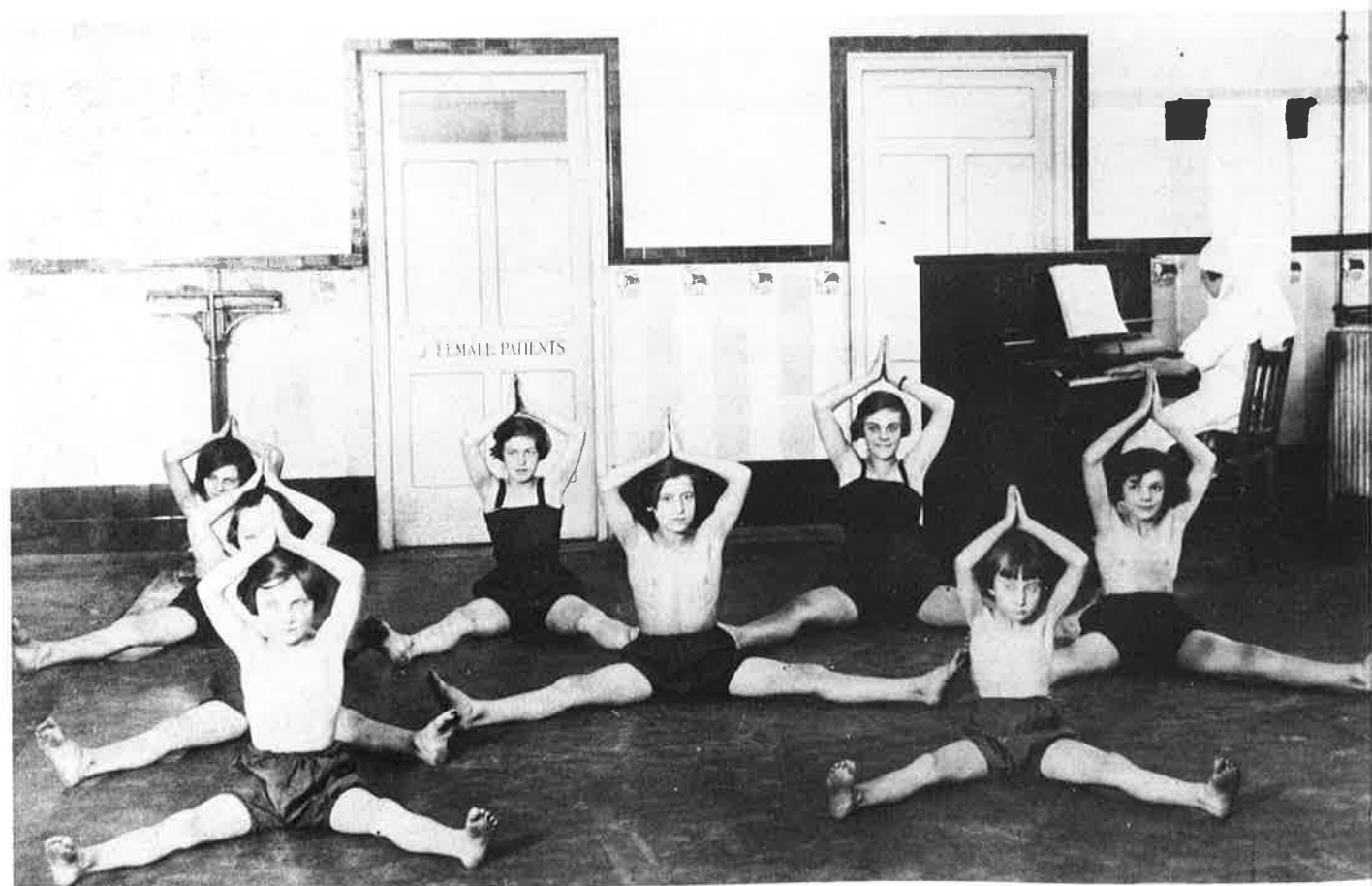
collecting for the hospitals, through the streets, always on one Sunday. Or sometimes I think they used to have a flag day as well, hospital flag day. People would go out with these little tiny flags for the hospital. You couldn't go into a hospital that wasn't in your district really.

Jane Birkett



Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital — crippled patients in gymnasium c. 1930.

St. Bartholomew's Hospital, Dancing and Health Class 1927



My mother used to pay in 3d a week to the Hospital Savings Association, the H.S.A. That covered the whole family and we all had our tonsils out in Beckenham Hospital, all of us, and I went in to have mine out. I was about 11. I remember the nurse, Nurse Sadler, because I wanted to be a nurse. I can remember coming to, and having ever such a sore throat and there was a girl next door to me named Rosey, but she was a bit posher, and she was a nuisance in the hospital. I can always remember this nurse saying, "Why don't you be a good girl like Elsie?" Us type wasn't any trouble, you know, not when you went in hospital. But she was a lovely nurse that Nurse Sadler.

We were given mostly jelly at first, but I always feared the medicine cupboard. When I used to see her go to the medicine cupboard I used to say, "Oh please don't give me any." Because it was horrible stuff in them days what they used to give you. That was the only thing I really feared was the medicine cupboard. You were only allowed visitors twice a week, Thursday for one hour and Sunday for one hour, only twice a week.

I suppose there must have been about ten beds down each side of the ward. It was a pretty hospital, a homely little place, and it's still there. We all went in there one after the other to have our tonsils out.

I think you were in there about 3 or 5 days. Anyway my mother never came to get me and I was crying. There was a mistake. I really thought she didn't want me. It was terrible. She was supposed to have come the day before with my clothes you see, because you took the clothes home, and I was so upset and I really thought she'd left me there. I can always remember going home and having a new laid egg off of Mrs. Crouch's chicken; only egg you got.

Elsie House

Camphorated oil was used for rubbing on chests. Lovely wasn't it? Used to be lovely. Used to rub my babies, their little feet, the tops of their heads.

Well, when my daughter was five she had mastoids in the ears. She went in the hospital to have them done. While she was in hospital, she caught pneumonia. And I dread pneumonia myself. When I have a bath on a Saturday, I get straight into bed. She caught pneumonia, and as you know, if you know anything about it, you go all black around the upper lip. That's the crisis. And me and my wife sat there two days and two nights. And the next day we sat there and we saw it gradually passing over and that darkness passing away and she recovered. The crisis had passed. I dread it, I'm frightened of pneumonia myself.

George Taylor

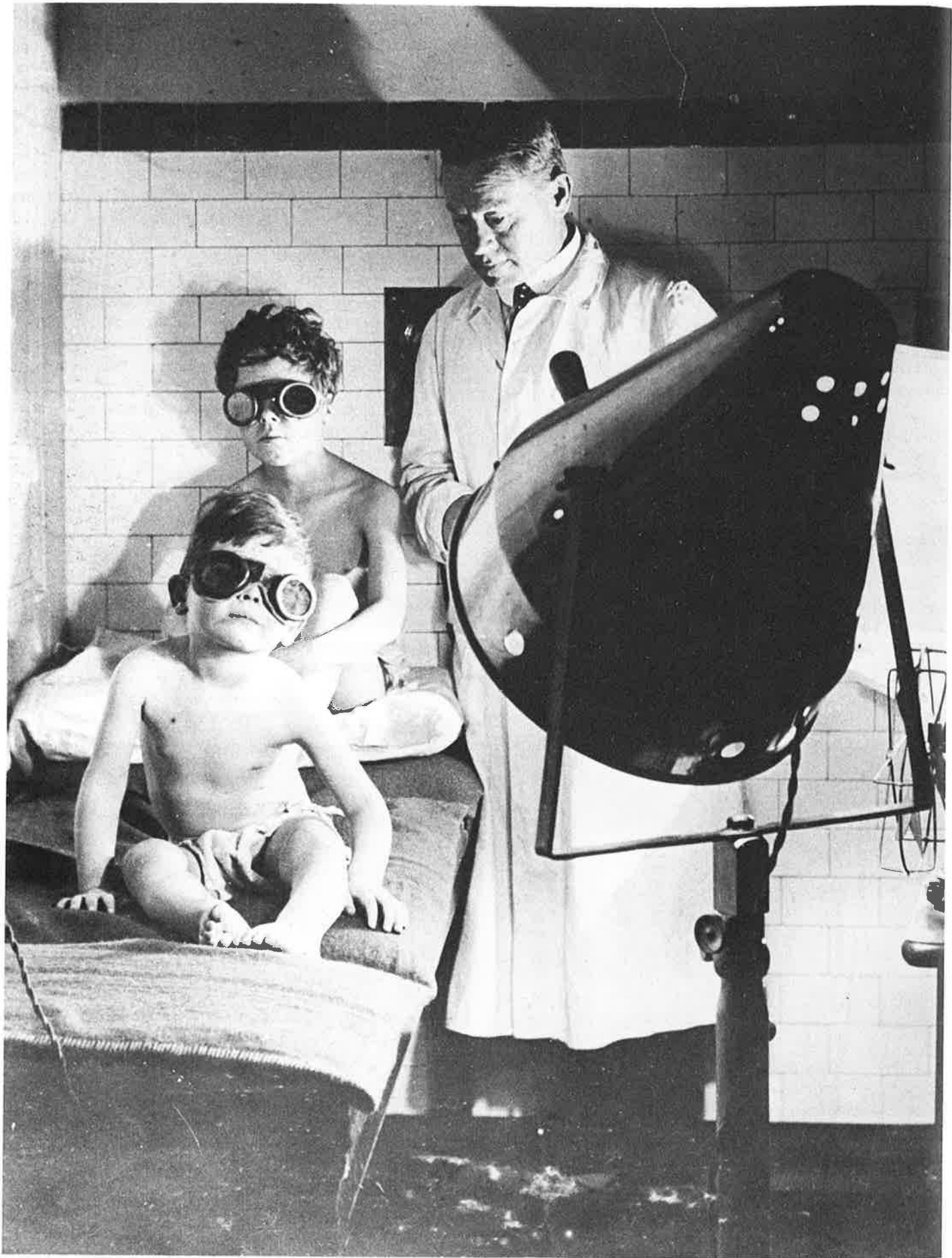
Impetigo is sores all over. I had tight ringlets and they shaved the head all over. I know a little girl in Deptford who had that. She had it all over terrible. She used to go to the children's hospital, Evelina Hospital, this little girl, and they used to make up starch poultices. Now you wouldn't believe it, Robin Starch, and they use to make it up like an ointment and put it all over her face like a mask. And that took it off.

And there was a family upstairs in my block of flats in Speedwell House and they had it and they kept the children indoors for about 6 months but one got out and scratched my boy on the face and he had it all over. I kept taking him to Miller Hospital and it wasn't getting any better; it was spreading. So my neighbour said, "Will you hold him for about a couple of hours?" So I said, "Cor, I'd do anything to get rid of it." She done it and that did the trick. The trick was starch, Robin Starch. She made it up like an ointment.

Flo Chandler

Heatherwood Sanatorium 1930's



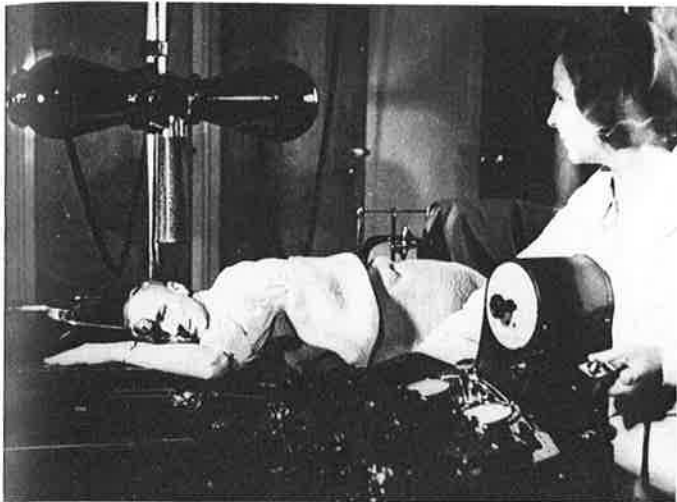


St. Thomas' Hospital: Dr. Murray Levick in his sunlight treatment clinic 1927.

I started work in 1938 at the Miller Hospital. It was a voluntary hospital then. I worked there 32 years as a domestic cleaner, until I became a senior housemaid. My chap worked there 34 years, and finished up mortuary technician.

There were boards up, lovely boards and they had all these gold letters, names of people that donated to the hospital. One family, Samuelsons, the boot people, they used to give turkeys at Christmas time. Every Christmas we had lovely food there.

Lil Davies



X-ray room Grange Medical Centre

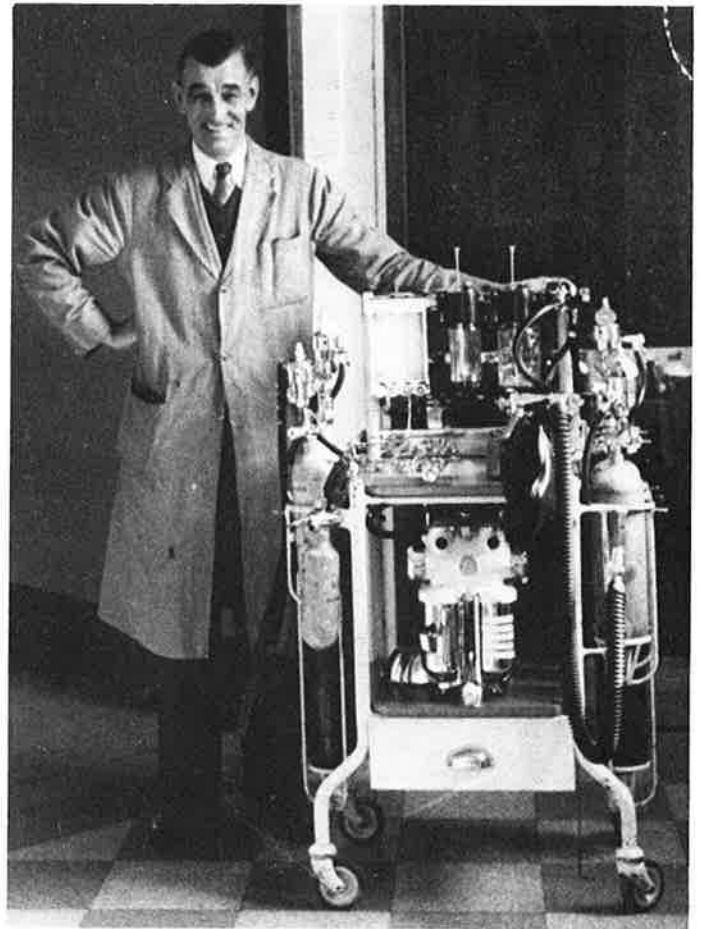
First of all I was quite interested in children and I thought of doing what they called Froebal teaching at that time and that fell through on one or two counts. I said to father, "Well I wouldn't mind doing hospital work." A friend of mine did physiotherapy first back in 1936 at the Middlesex Hospital School for Radiography and that was about the time that fitted in with me and anyhow I got into the school and became a radiographer.

We had to spend a month in the ward first of all on a general ward to see if we were suitable, they would say psychologically adjusted to hospital life because lots of people can write a paper but if they see somebody faint or have a heart attack they have one with them. You were just a general dogsbody and then if you seemed to pass you were allowed to go into the school. Well you had to do anatomy, photography, what they called radiation physics, how I did that I don't know. Medical photography, how to take Xrays — radiographic techniques and we did about 6 exams.

The training lasted two years and the second year we went out to another hospital to gain more experience, and I got Great Ormond Street. I quite liked children and was rather pleased about that. And then the war came and I was with Lewisham Hospital because they wanted people — I think they took on a lot of extra people during the war. All the LCC hospitals wanted extra staff.

Then after the war there was this job going at the Evalina. It was a children's hospital in Southwark. A lot of the children had been sent out to evacuation, but gradually they were coming back and I was asked one morning would I like to go full time because things were getting busier and I said yes.

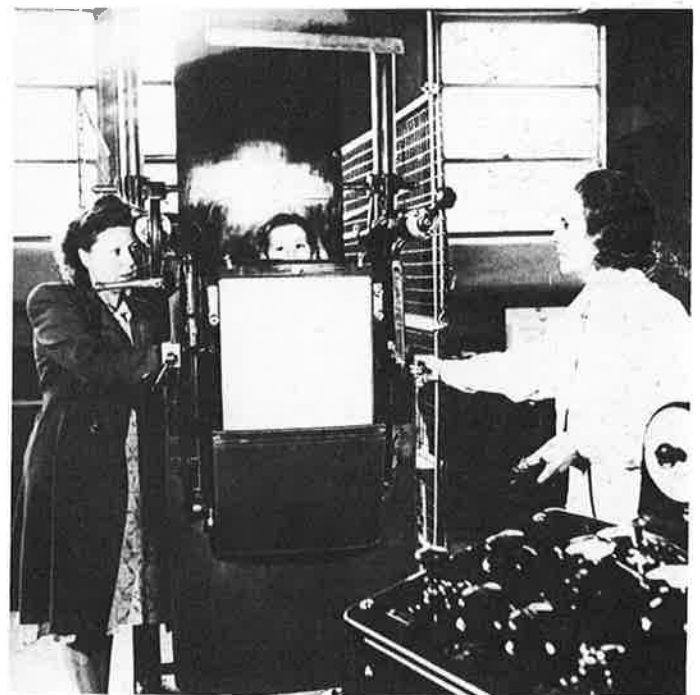
Vivian Prince



Anaesthetist and his equipment 1930's

I can remember a story my mother told me. When I was about six, I had this bad ear and she took me to Belgrave Hospital. She had to come home and borrow the half-crown for the X-ray before they'd X-ray it.

Joan Lockton



X-ray room Grange Medical Centre

I had mastoids when I was young, and I was under St. Thomas's Hospital. When I needed an operation I was sent to a Childrens Home, down the line. The cost was five shillings a week. And then when I came home I was under St. Thomas's again. But, the people in the street used to say (My mum's name was Mrs. Hurd, but everybody in the street called her Hurdy) they used to say, "Eh, Hurdy, when your Nanny goes up to the Hospital today can she have a cough please because my Johnny's got a cough." My dad would say, "Cough, Nan." And I'd say, "What dad? What Dad?" I was hard of hearing. I used to get it free for her kids, truly.

Oh and they always had constipation. "My old man can't go Hurdy, ask your Nanny . . ." No, this is God's honour. They didn't give you little bottles then, they gave you great big bottles you know.

My Dad used to say, "If they ask you any questions love, you can't hear 'em. Cock a deaf 'un." "Alright Dad." And I've always taken advantage of my deafness!

Nan Janes

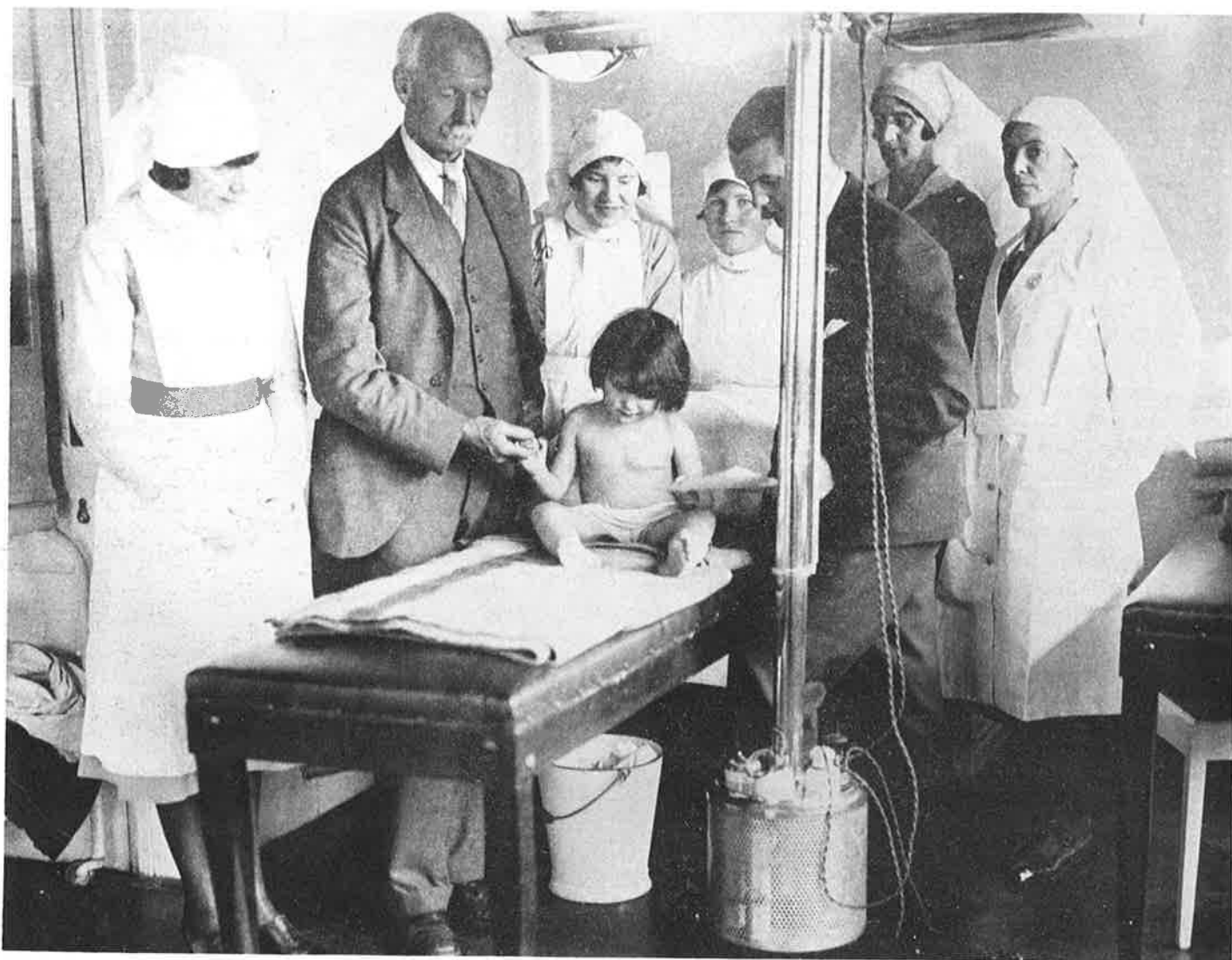
I had a very bad cast in one eye, so I was cross-eyed. I always remember the doctor said, "Well when she's old enough, she can have an operation on her eye for the appearance."

Well when I became eleven, I was taken to the Royal Westminster Eye Hospital. And they got me ready for the operation. They took me down to the theatre. They didn't put me to sleep; they just give me a local anaesthetic. I was awake all the time and I could just see, I had my eye clamped open, and I could just see the doctors working on it.

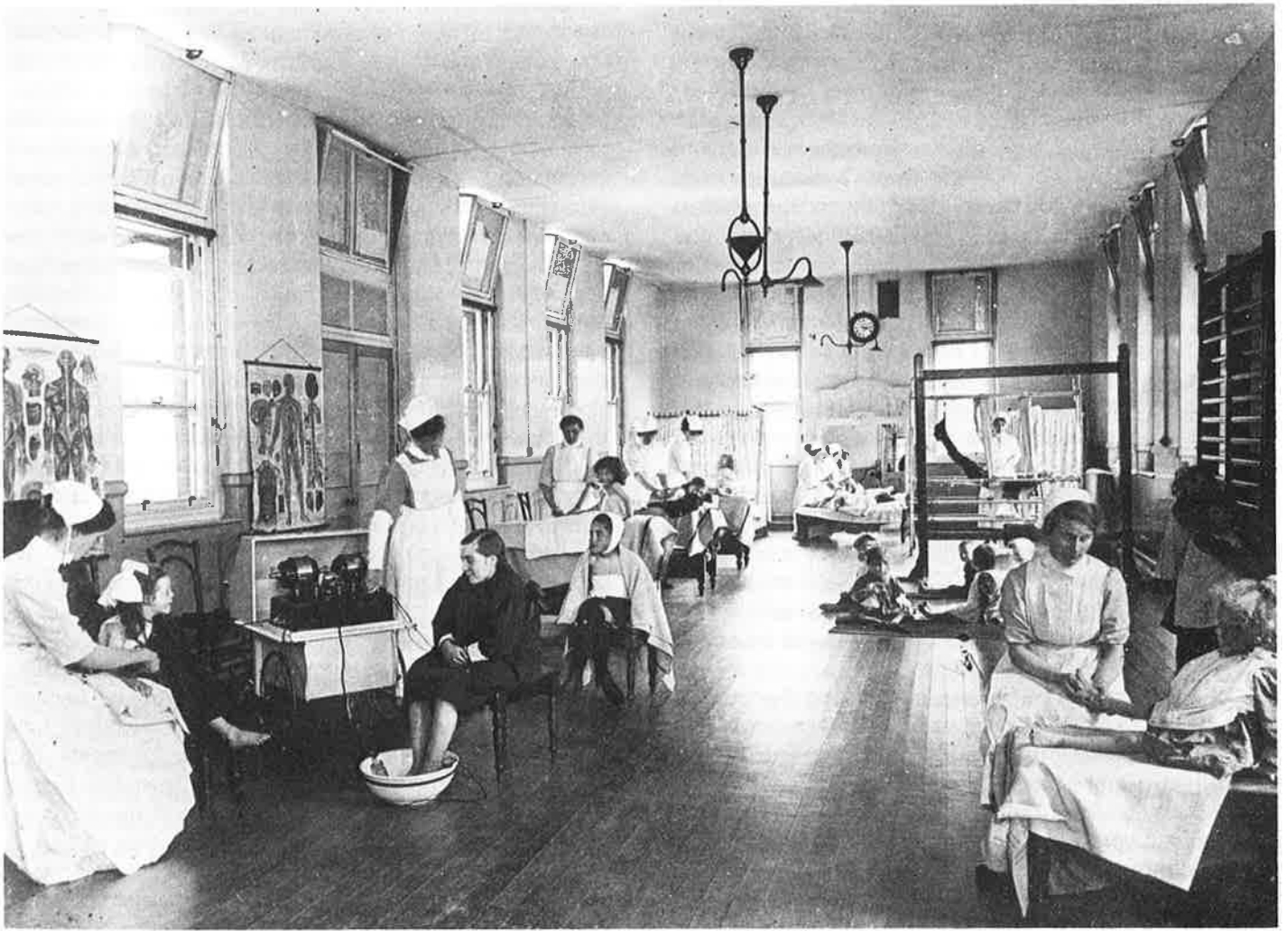
Anyway, I came up from there, and I was bandaged around both eyes for about nine days. I always remember the nurse said to me the following day, "You've been such a good girl, here's a nice bottle of Lavender Water." But after I was allowed up, I saw some women lying there, and when I see leeches now it turns me, because they had these big leeches on their eyes, drawing out all the bad blood. And when I see slugs now I go cold.

Well you could just see the blood, where these leeches were resting on their faces.

Hetty Ellis



Royal Westminster Ophthalmic Hospital: Prof. Leonard Hill, sunlight and ultra violet and electro therapeutic treatment 1930



Metropolitan Asylums Board — treatment by electricity and massage c. 1930

Metropolitan Asylums Board — graduated drill c. 1930

