

## A CAREER IN NURSING

Well I started nursing on August 10th 1935. Certain dates stick out in your memory. I can't ever remember a time when I didn't want to be a nurse.

We found this hospital, it was St. Mark's Hospital, City Road, and remember I'd come from the country and so I sent off for an application form. It was a special hospital. It specialised in all diseases of the rectum which is marvellous for a seventeen year old, but I didn't know, and neither did my parents, what it all referred to. Matron wrote to me and said would I send a photograph and I did and I think I had to get a medical certificate from the doctor. No interview. Then I had a letter to say will you come on August 10th at 4 o'clock. So my mother and father came to London with me. I can remember to this day I just ran through those hospital doors and looked back at them. I waved them goodbye and I'd gone you see. Well Matron's office was just inside the main doors. I knocked on the door. "Come in", Matron said "Good afternoon nurse. How are your feet?"

I said, "Oh they're fine." "Oh good" she said. "Well in that case I'll send for Nurse Schoils. She will take you up to your room, put your uniform on and tea will be at half past 4 and you'll be on the wards at 5."

My parents paid half of the uniform and the hospital paid the rest. Nurse Schoils said, "Well there's your uniform. I'm just going." I started struggling into it and I thought, my God I'd have to get up at the crack of dawn to get this lot on. Well it was rather long. It had buttons that went from about 18 inches below the waist to a very tight waist and then tiny pearl buttons all the way up to the shirt collar at the neck, this stiff collar it used to cut our necks and we used to wear cotton wool too, they were that stiff. Linen starched, you know like men's collars used to be starched.

Well I got as far as that and I went down stairs and Schoils put me where they had tea, and she said it was a junior nurses job to cut bread and butter — bread for all the nurses coming in for tea. So at half past 4 I was busy cutting up slices of bread and people were very polite. They said can I have some bread please, and that was that, so I got through tea all right. It was all very strange.

Then Schoils took me up to Fournier Ward. This was at 5 o'clock. I'd only arrived at the place at 4. Fortunately it was females, I would have died if it had been men. She said to the staff nurse, "This is the new nurse and she's just arrived, and Matron said would I leave her." So the staff nurse said "Oh yes", and she took me into the ward and said, "Do the bed pan round." I'd never even seen a bedpan. I didn't know what it was like to do a bedpan round. I didn't dare to ask where to go or what to do. I mean she just walked away. She said, "Just get on with it." Anyway this woman patient said, "Hello, we haven't seen you before, how long have you been here? How long have you been a nurse?" So I said, "About half an hour." They all roared with laughter and this patient was absolutely marvellous. "Never mind my dear we'll tell you what to do." And they did. They were absolutely super, and do you know for the first few days those patients carried me. But they really were, they were super. That's why I say I don't know what would have happened to me if I'd been on the men's ward."

I only stayed in that hospital for fourteen months because you had no proper training, I mean just shown once how to do everything and I had to get on with it and I

spent my life doing bed pans, enemas, colostomy washouts and I didn't really like it. My parents didn't really understand what I was doing and its very hard to tell your parents what you're doing when it's a job like that, and they said, "Well you wanted to be a nurse; you jolly well stay there." No joy from that. I said, "Can I come home?" "No you can't, you started it, so give it a longer trial." But after 14 months my own common sense came to my rescue. I left there and I went to what is now a general hospital but it was called Redhill County Hospital and things were entirely different. There we didn't go on the wards for 2 months. I mean the hospital had been opened only 10 years and it was administered by the Middlesex County Council. It wasn't a Poor Law Institution; it was in the days when the local authorities ran their own hospitals and the Middlesex County Council had five and they were very very good and their hospitals were good and I'm always glad that I had such good training.

I liked it the minute I got there and I'd had this little bit of experience which was a great help and the minute I got there I sort of took to it like a duck takes to water. I got on all right there. Anyway I got SRN in 1940. I did all the things one does, three months here, three months there and then the war started and I was there. And we became a casualty clearing station for civilian air raid victims. I did my finals during the blitz in 1940, my certificate had September 1940 on it. I went to Watford Town Hall to take my Finals and the invigilator said, "Now if the sirens go you choose whether you stay here or whether you go to the shelters." Anyway the sirens did go, so they said, "Anybody want to go to the shelter?" and we all said no. It wasn't much of a choice really. On the other hand you couldn't sort of break up your life too much because of the raids. When the place started to shake you made a dive for somewhere.

From there I went on — have you heard of Mill Hill Public School? Well it was turned into a hospital during the war but it was a very special hospital, it was a psychiatric hospital, not a mental hospital. We didn't have our knives and forks locked up like they do in a mental hospital and we didn't have the doors locked and it was free, free to come and go for the patients as well as us.

At this Mill Hill Psychiatric Hospital the whole point was to get the men off the battle field and get them into hospital very quickly. Whether you were the most junior nurse or the most senior psychiatrist we all worked as a team and you know we used to have weekly meetings. It isn't what it is today when only the senior staff get together, we would have everybody on the ward. I mean we used to discuss all the patients and you know what was best for them, what wasn't. It was the only hospital of its kind but it was too expensive staff-wise to run. We had to have a very heavy staff-patient ratio you see. We were completely ruled there by these psychiatrists and psychologists and their rule was that should any patient ever want to speak to us we dropped tools and talked to them. We went into the office and talked to them and this is what we did, but you'd never have a pencil or paper there; you'd give them your attention and then you'd try to recall what they had said and make notes for the psychiatrist.

Because this is how you got through to people, to what is really troubling them because we had a lot of other people, besides shell shocks. It was our job to see if they

were fit. It was really horrid of us to get them fit for a battle field — but that was what you were supposed to do. We didn't know it at the time. But at the end of the war you got the reverse reaction because there were people who liked the army and didn't want to go out, especially among the women. Women had just become free and they were in the WAAFS, the ATS and the WRNS and a lot of them knew that when the war ended they wouldn't be needed and they didn't want to leave, because they were frightened of being out on their own. But they were independent if you know what I mean, they weren't living at home and it was a strange period. I know this sounds odd but it worked. A lot of our patients got better and — you see if they didn't get better they got sent off to proper mental hospitals, but they were the minority. The whole thing was so enthusiastic, it was so full of life, it was so — I wouldn't have missed it, not for anything that two years I spent at Mill Hill and our patients did get better.

The Beveridge Plan. I thought it was super, I mean I thought no more starving little children will come into the hospitals, no more will people be at their last gasp, we would get people who are really ill. Nursing was like that; you don't like seeing people come into hospital half starved, or women coming into hospital having borne ten children in ten years and then the husband complaining that we wanted to sterilise her. So to me and everybody of my age this was marvellous. Because not only did the new welfare state mean free medical care, it meant the dole, supplementary pensions, no one need starve, nobody has to depend on anyone else for financial support, everybody is financially independent and so on. It sounded like the

millenium. It was absolutely marvellous. Remember everything was free, glasses were free, teeth were free, prescriptions were free, I mean I feel very sorry we're fast going back to the bad old days when you paid. I can see that coming can't you? This is terrible . . . The hospitals that are being closed, I think that's absolutely terrible. I don't know what people are thinking about, closing these hospitals.

Then they decided that they would have great big hospitals. It takes you a month of Sundays to find out where you are, where you're going, and then to get there it takes another month of Sundays. There's no soul to the places.

You could have the biggest the most beautiful and the best equipment in the world but there's going to be nothing in the atmosphere of that hospital. Go to little cottage hospitals the minute you walk through the door it's happy, it's friendly, all the nurses are friendly, they all smile at you the whole thing works as a team you know.

We didn't have patients labelled. I'm not sure whether it's a good thing or a bad thing, but you should know every patient's name and you should know their face, that's why they come in a day before the operation because you talk to them and show them to their bed, generally admit them and you're supposed to know who they are. And a nurse from the ward went to the theatre with them and a nurse from the ward went to fetch them back so you'd know whether you'd got the right patient or not and they got their notes and notes were handed over from the ward. To me it seemed an awful thing when I had a bracelet put on with my name and number on.

Alice Minett

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NURSING NOTES.

APRIL, 1925.

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Really the fun we got out of our job outstripped the hardness of it. You accepted discipline. You'd run a mile if you saw the matron coming, disappearing act. There would be five nurses on the ward and as soon as we saw the sister, we'd just make one move out.

We used to ring up the telephone exchange for a night out with the boys, a few hours off, asking if they wanted to take two girls from St. Georges and we'd be outside on the steps. Then when they wanted to get fresh, after they'd given us a lovely meal, we all stuck together — there was always two or three of us and we'd say, "Oh I'm sorry, we're going back for a lecture." And the poor souls would look really heartbroken.

You made life long friends. I've still got one that I met when I first left home when I was 17. She lives in Somerset now, and two or three have only recently died this year in their late 70's. It's marvellous really. There was the companionship.

And didn't we work? Dusting, pulling all the beds out, scrubbing the commodes. Our first job in the morning was to pull all the beds out into the middle of the ward, sweep all round, damp dust at the back of the beds, push them abck again, and do the lockers. If the sister was in a bad mood, oh it was fatal. You'd look at her face and she would just stand at the top of the ward and if those corners weren't the envelope corners, God she was vicious!



*London Fever Hospital — Tennis trophy presentation*

The night sister would come on every morning when you were on night duty and it was when the lovely weather was on. We were tennis players, and I was captain of our tennis team. We'd all be dressed up in tennis things with a nightie on top. We'd say, "Good morning sister, ah we're so tired." Soon as she closed the door, we were off out. We were never tired really. I've often given a false name going out of the gate and a false name coming in. We had some fun. I remember the time we had a very lah-di-da sister tutor — now we used to invite the forces from Bird Cage Walk to our socials once a month and we had a nurse there and she was a good mimic and she used to be able to mimic our sister tutor, so we dared her to ring up Bird Cage Walk and invite the soldiers — a bus load — to our social. They all arrived but not one of them got in.

We used to go to HMV, the record shop in Oxford Street. We hadn't a penny to our name. We were in green uniform, about four of us. We'd get some records, go upstairs into the little rooms and spend the afternoon listening to records. In the end the manager would say, "Why don't you bring your tea and sandwiches tomorrow nurses?" We never bought anything.

Once a month when we got our pay, a treat was to go to a dinner dance and have chop and chips. When I was going the fevers, we'd got our pay and we'd just got half a crown each. During the afternoon my friend wanted to go to the lavatory — well you couldn't afford a penny to go to the lavatory, so we saved it until we went to the dinner dance in the evening with our chop and chips. Well then sitting at the next table we got talking to a couple of chaps and we didn't have to spend our half crowns. One of these fellows had had a drop too much and I went waltzing — you couldn't call it dancing, just going round. He was a bit tiddley so I said to my friend, "Don't you go and have a dance with him. He's not right." However she couldn't avoid it. Down he went in front of the bandstand.

You did your first exam after three months to see if you were suitable, and if you were suitable you went into block and you took your preliminary. You passed that and then you went on to the further two years. Some people couldn't even pass their preliminary, yet they were fantastic nurses but nerves got the better of them at their exams. When you got your blue belt you're very Miss Important, aren't you? You wait by the board for the names to go up, and then you wait for the little buff letter from the General Nursing Council after the three years to say you've passed. Then you have your hospital badge, your hospital buckle, and you're a big bug then. You really are. You change. I always remember my father saying when I rang up to say "Oh I've passed." He said, "It's nice to be important, but it's important to be nice." I felt I was the cat's whiskers when I had my blue belt.

During our training, we went round with the staff midwife and I think we had to be present at twenty births before we started to deliver them on our own.

I worked in the slums of Edinburgh and it was really an education right down by Holyrood. They were the worst slums imaginable. And yet the community there were marvellous. All the little children knew Mrs So and So was having a baby. You'd find a squad of children there waiting for you to come out. And the babies — it wasn't long before they got fleas all over them, flea bitten. It was ghastly but the spirit amongst those people living in the slums was terrific. And invariably they'd got a quarter of a pound box of chocolates or a packet of biscuits stuck up on a filthy wardrobe and when the baby was delivered they'd hand you this. And the next door lady would be there with a clean pinny on to help. It really was an education.

Christmas, that was very nice and very moving. We'd all have red inside our capes but we only used the red at Christmas time so that when you had your navy cape you had little bands that went round and inside was all scarlet. Now at Christmas time there were nurses with little candles, the doctors and everyone, everyone went round the wards singing carols and it was a beautiful sight, very moving and a lot of patients would really break their hearts that weren't going home and these carols and the nurses in red and white. It was a very moving picture.





It was bedside nursing when we nursed but now you've got to have a steady hand to push the needle in and a good maths brain to know how many units and points she's got to have and that's what it's all about. It's all drugs now.

In those days there weren't the antibiotics. I think the greatest thrill for any nurse in those days was to nurse a pneumonia patient. There were no antibiotics, nothing; it was sheer bedside nursing. You remember the patients. There was one I looked after she died when she was 90 about 5 years ago, and I kept up with her all that time.



A terrific amount of hospitals have been closed and I can't understand why. For one thing the population, the older population is increasing.

They're technical nurses now, young technicians. In a way I prefer my own age, I prefer those times. I think there was more contact with the patients. Today it's in and out isn't it? Yes well of course today they seem to work shift system. We didn't you see. We started in the morning and we finished in the evening. You might have a break at lunchtime, perhaps two hours to change uniform or change aprons but you did a full day, and nights as well. There was the contact with the patients. The patients you knew and you were with them till they got better. Now today they seem to see a different one every day perhaps two or three times a day.

Mrs. Barrett and Mrs Ferres

I don't want to be one of those people who think the good old days were the best, because there's a lot of good coming through all the time. But there was much more care of the patients because they had to have much more care. Your only hope was to nurse them through. I'd say it was skilled nursing that mattered in the end, you know. The doctors very often knew how things happened and how you ticked, but they hadn't got the tools to see to it.

Dr. Gorman

I would say that nursing care is now inferior to what it used to be. Now it has become so specialised and so technical that really the nurse has to be a technician, but at the expense of what in my opinion are basic nursing skills. I have had experience of being in hospital as a patient myself fairly recently. I unfortunately had a fall and broke my hip. I was in traction so I couldn't move and I actually had to ask to have my pressure points done. I had to ask to be helped onto the bed pan. That would never have occurred in the old days, because that would have been part of basic nursing, very basic. No I actually heard that Sister say one day — she got all her staff in, she used to have them in every day and give a sort of lecture, and she said, "There's two things you have to do when you're running a ward: one, you have to discipline the staff, and two, you have to discipline the patients." I was totally appalled, and I heard that same sister telling the nurses not to stand chatting to the patients. They're actively discouraged now from chatting to the patients and this is entirely the opposite from what I was taught.

The design of wards: that's another thing that's coming full circle. There was the Nightingale ward and that's where the sister or night nurse sat during the night she had a light and all the patients in the ward could see that — a long narrow ward with the desk at one end and beds either side. You can't beat it. Instead they divide

everybody up and they have a selection of four-bedded wards and then you'll have a central nurses' console here with lights connecting everyone. Nobody who is in there can see anything at all because the doors are closed and at night nothing happens at all. Now you've all got bells to push and there are never ever more than two people or maybe three at most if everybody's there and nobody's been called away to help somewhere else. Now when you've got all these patients it only wants one patient to ring a bell for some reason and everyone then leaves the console and my question has always been what happens to the person here who has a cardiac arrest? The people who are answering the bell won't be there. We used to walk round with our torch shielded and have a look at everybody and if they weren't asleep we would say would you like a drink of milk or something like that or we would get the doctor along to get them something to help them go to sleep. But the thing was everyone in the Nightingale Ward could look to that light and call the nurse and she would come, but you could say nurse as long as you liked and there's no guarantee that if you ring that bell someone is there to hear you. But they have now realised that these four bedded wards are not working and it would be best to go back. They thought it was better to have more privacy for the patient and better for the nurses, but it isn't better for anybody.

Mrs. Jo Page

*Group of Nurses 1920's*



*St. Thomas' Hospital Children's Veranda c. 1930*





## MIDWIFERY

When I was training in Manchester, it was a terribly poor district. There were children sitting on the steps of the house. As soon as the kids saw the nurse coming on her bike, they were missing. They'd gone to tell Mum, so when you got into the place, she'd have a bowl under the bed with the nappies she had been washing in, and she'd be back in bed looking like a lady. Some of them were very very poor. We'd give one of the kids twopence to fetch a penny batch bun and some brew in a pint mug. We were trying to get them to breastfeed. You'd put them to the breast and they'd have nothing to eat or drink in the morning. So the first thing we did was to part with twopence of our own money, which was a lot then, to fetch a batch cake and brew in the mug. And they'd go to the shop and they'd come back with a scalding enamel mug of tea. And we'd wash Mum, and while we were bathing the baby, we'd give Mum the batch cake and tea, so that when we put the baby to the breast there was something to suck at. If you did this, or if you didn't, you still had bottles to find, and how were they going to clean the bottles? It was cows milk then in the bottle and we got them on to the cup as soon as possible because it was easier to keep clean.

But you got very fond of those mums just the same. But there'd be these bowls under the bed and you'd pretend not to see it, you didn't want to see it. It wasn't your job anyway. We weren't allowed to wash the nappies. Afterwards when we got on districts of our own, many is the time we took the nappies home to dry. They hadn't got washing machines had they, or facilities for drying them, and they couldn't go and buy bags of disposables.

When I first came to London as a midwife, I had a living room and four bedrooms and the pupils were always there because they were having to be taught all this you see, so you had two or three pupils living in your house. You had to be in the position when you applied for that certificate, you had to have a place where you could sleep them and feed them. They visited your home to see under what conditions you were living. For instance, you had to have a shower so the girls could have the same facilities that they'd had in hospital, or they weren't happy with you. A lot of them were doctors' daughters — and Daddy — you know Daddy — had to approve of what the girl told him when she went home.

All these girls were state registered nurses who had done three months midwifery in hospital and they came to you for their second three months, so you had a change every three months and you had to write up their performances daily and weekly. The student midwives went into their own hospital once a week for a lecture by the midwife, the doctors or whatever.

You had to make sure they got up about seven and got themselves ready for the district. We had our breakfast almost before anything else in case a call came. You had to wear your uniform. You weren't allowed out without uniform.

You had to really be able to put across midwifery, and there were other things besides midwifery. Down at the welfare I'd always got a student with me either weighing the mothers or taking the blood pressures or looking at their tummies to find out how many weeks they were, whether the baby was lying properly and the baby's heart ticking properly, or looking at the mother's legs for varicose veins.



We were busy doing the round in the morning, the afternoon was clinic. The doctors knew the day it was clinic and if their patients were coming they would probably come along. Then when they stopped having clinics in the nurses' own private homes they had them at the doctor's, or down at the welfare centre. When the students first came we would go out together, and by about six weeks you'd seen they'd had a few deliveries, they would go and do it on their own, and you would slip in and see if they were all right. There were charts in the patient's home, a chart for the students that they had to have for their exams and the chart for the midwife, the register that she had to keep. There was a large amount of paper work and God help you if you got behind because by then you were tired and you couldn't remember. The afternoons you had various things, if you had mothers booked, not delivered, you would visit their homes. In the last month you visited their homes each week, that had to be done in the afternoons, then there was the evening round of nursing. You did an evening round for the first three days, so you'd probably mix up the ante-natal visits to see if the mum's bedroom was suitable to have the baby in, where you were going to heat the water etc., things you'd need were all there, that everything was ready at least two months before hand. And if they hadn't got it one week, you wrote it down for mum to do and for you to make sure it was there. If Mum was getting a bit of blood pressure and swollen legs, you didn't ask her to come to the clinic at all. You did all the visits in the home for her.



*Community midwives checking their equipment*



I was very happy on the district, because once you went into a patient's home you were their friend. I made a lot of friends. I still go and see some of them. I still go and visit my old mums and some of their youngsters. All the husbands as well as the wives they were marvellous. The wife got the first kiss and the midwife got the second. I was always for the husbands being in the room when they had their babies and that was the way life went on.

120 hours a week we were on call and then it got a little better and they decided that being on call wasn't really being off duty. We kept niggling away all the time, because we wanted a bit of private life and so we started to have a day and a half a week off. The students were young and full of fun. They'd all got boyfriends who liked to come and visit them and when the room wasn't being used for an ante-natal room, I'd got a big billiard table in it. Most of them liked a bit of music and if they played a fiddle they'd bring it along and someone else would play the piano and on top of the billiard table we put a badminton set and table tennis, to keep fit, and even now I've got a bicycle

A good midwife could cope with any situation. She would know whether something had gone wrong and she needed to whisk you off to hospital. So there wasn't the insistence that all children should be born in hospital as there is now. The midwife was very skilled. I wouldn't like to tell you how many doctors I've had to rescue who didn't know how to deal with a breach, and that was actually in hospitals. Now of course they've found out they've run out of skilled midwives. Home deliveries have been discouraged, whereas before even the first baby could be born at home. Subsequent ones no question unless the previous birth had been difficult. At the moment the hospitals are still saying that patients should be delivered in hospital, but women and midwives are now saying, "No, we want it back the way we had it."

We had it absolutely right around 1948-50 for a period of about 10 years, certainly where I worked. We had midwives doing home deliveries and if they got into trouble they called on an obstetric flying squad that came out with everything needed to deal with any emergency, but they don't have flying squads now. Women are now beginning to be more vociferous and standing up for themselves. They want natural childbirth, they want to be delivered at home, and radical midwives entirely agree with them.

I think we will get back to home deliveries but it's going to take some time because now they haven't got the midwives with the experience or the training or in sufficient numbers. But this is what women are asking for; they don't want hospitalisation. I know for a long time that births have been planned by induction so that they don't take place at weekends. One of the biggest hospitals in London never have deliveries at the weekend. I just don't think that's on.





*Nurses and babies c. 1920*

*Elsie Walkerdine seated left*

I think that there's very few people of my age that don't know Elsie Walkerdine from Deptford. Really and truly, yes she was really a fantastic person. She was like every other girl; they all had their fancies for boys and the boys had their fancy for her you see. This particular young man he really sort of felt quite a bit for Elsie but she gave him to understand that nursing was going to be her life. He tried all ways to persuade her not to take it up. He would like to court her and all that sort of jazz, but no. She went on with her nursing.

Nurse Walkerdine delivered nearly five thousand babies including triplets at home without the aid of a doctor.

During the war, we were bombed out, but she came back and she wouldn't take any leave. She went back to see the mother in the next turning. She'd delivered her of a baby in the early hours of that morning just before we were bombed out you know. She was greatly admired by the people. She was delivering babies in the area, a very thickly populated area, and it wasn't everybody that was able to turn around and say, "Well alright nurse, here's my money." They used to give her so much on a card, they would give her kind. She had to depend on what mothers gave her until 1937 or 1938 when the GLC took over all the domiciliary midwives. So therefore she then got something that she hadn't had before, not only a regular wages, but a definite holiday, a day and a half a week or

something like that, Saturday afternoons and Sundays.

I used to go out with Elsie rather than sit in the shelter. People used to come along and say, "Nurse my wife's started labour. Would you come along? Or will you have to wait until this is over?" Because they'd come as soon as their wives started in labour, perhaps the guns would be going, the bombs were dropping and suchlike, but Elsie never ever refused. She said, "If you've come round for me during this, I can come back with you." And I know that one young man had come round — Elsie had a tin hat you see, but he didn't he had a saucepan on his head. There was always some little thing that happened and you could turn around and laugh about it you know. Elsie was a very, very jovial person.

One woman she delivered twenty-one babies. And that was in Deptford, and the twenty-first baby was born in Deptford High Street. No not in the High Street, Elsie had a room over the shops and this particular night, she woke me up and said, "Mary I've got to go out. I've got to go to Mrs. Brittan." "Oh", I said, "this I must see," so I got up. And it was the twenty-first baby. They all lived when they were born.

Then she delivered triplets in a turning in Hyde Street, girls, three girls. Elsie went and delivered these babies and after the delivery and everything was cleared up she called in the doctor. He said, "Sister, why didn't you call me in?"

# “Mother” to 4,000 Deptford Babies

## Miss Elsie Walkerdine says Good-bye

So she said, “What for? There was nothing wrong. I knew what was coming along. Had I called you in things wouldn’t have been so straight forward because that would have upset the mother. All I want now is a tonic for the mother.” She was able to give people confidence. And people who had been in the profession, they were always very fond of calling on Elsie for her advice.

I know for a fact that Elsie has gone down or sent down to the pawn shop on a Sunday morning and knocked them up when the person that was going to be confined was in labour, and the baby’s clothes had been pawned, and the baby was coming along quicker than they’d thought. It’s true they used to go down and knock the pawnbroker up to get the baby’s things out of pawn.

Elsie knew her job so that she didn’t worry about not having a bathroom. I mean you’d see the way that she bathed a baby, in an ordinary washing bowl. You’d think, “Oh my God, will she drop it?” It was fascinating to see her — the same movement every time, the way she would take the baby out of the bath — lay it on her lap you know.

As soon as they fell for a baby they’d come round and see Nurse and then she would give them a card and they’d pay so much. Of course she never said, “Oh well, no I’m sorry I can’t come down you haven’t finished paying me. Never. No she wasn’t that kind of person. Sometimes they used to pay her in kind, they’d give her sugar, and tea and butter.

She never had her own car. So most of her visits were on foot. I don’t think I can remember her riding a bike, but I believe she did in the very early stages of her work. No, she used to walk. North, south, east and west, she had some fair trots you know over Deptford.

Mary Thorley

“The Council will lose the services of an officer who has given many years of her life to extremely valuable work carried out at times under most difficult conditions.

“During the past 40 years Miss Walkerdine has delivered nearly 4,000 babies, mostly in Deptford, and has become widely known and respected by several generations of mothers in that area.

“This is a magnificent record of service. She will be greatly missed both by the mothers of Deptford and by her colleagues, whose affection she has won by her kindness and readiness to help at any time.”

In these words the L.C.C. Public Health Committee bade farewell in December to one of Deptford’s best-loved women—sixty-five years old Miss Elsie Walkerdine, domiciliary midwife, and the friend of thousands, and now living in her small flat in Sycamore Buildings, Edward Street.

At County Hall under the glare of the TV cameras, Deptford’s Little Nurse told shyly of the experiences that make her “mother to them all,” records “The Kentish Mercury.” A mother who, although many of her “babies” have now grown up, will always be remembered in Deptford.



Nurse Walkerdine she delivered nearly all Mum's babies. I remember she came in once and we had that big front room over there and I was on my knees scrubbing the floor and she said, "Oh you are a good girl." She gave me sixpence, well it was a lot of money in those days. I suppose I was only about eight.

They couldn't afford the doctor because to go to a doctor was a shilling, but for a shilling you could get a meal so they used to go down to Nurse Walkerdine's house and she'd examine them and she'd tell them near enough when they was going to have the baby.

The first two children I think were still-born because times was very hard then. There's no telling really, but I think there was three before me, and then my mum had a miscarriage between my sister and me. There was 2 years difference between the others and then I had a sister. I was about 17 when she died and she died in the babies hospital. My mum lost two at 2 months old. They had bronchial pneumonia. The last one me mum lost when she was 47. She used to take in a lot of washing in them days and we used to go round the washing baths. You hung the washing over great big wooden things. You had to drag them out and hang your washing over them to dry. Well they were very heavy and my mum I suppose pulling them out and her being 47 and in her change she lost the baby boy. He was 2 months old. They said there was something wrong with the stomach. She had a very bad time, she nearly lost her life. She didn't go into hospital, she had them all at home.

It was only those that had the money that really went into hospital and nursing homes in those days.

More often than not with a still born baby I think they were put in with someone who died. I do know one woman who died in childbirth. She was only young and it was her first baby. They buried the baby with her, a lovely little boy.

There were women who were two year breeders and that's what they called them. Some people got to the state where they tried to perhaps terminate but they never succeeded, not the couple that I know of didn't.

My mum lost her children but she never tried to get rid of them. She always used to say, "The Lord will find a crust for it somewhere."

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You were supposed to stay in bed for ten days, but the majority of them used to get up in between and potter around. They never stopped in bed all that time and the majority of them used to feed their babies, a lot of them couldn't afford the milk in them days. They couldn't afford to buy it. I know when I had my girl I went in to have her and she lost a couple of ounces and they said, "Well if she's underweight you won't be able to take her out." But the trouble was that I was so slim that I didn't have any nipples, so they gave me the shields to try and feed her, because she couldn't take the milk. By not having the feed she was very miserable and she had lost a bit weight, and on the day I got up, I lost every drop of milk I had.

I came out of hospital on the Sunday and they said, "We'll give you a little bottle and a bit of Cow and Gate to tide you over but it's going to cost you about 15 shillings a week for Cow and Gate, so you'll have to persevere." So I had to drink lots and lots of water and milk. Anyway I fed her and I fed all of them, the four of them, so it worked itself out really. It was cheap.

When the local women were pregnant, the Albany always gave them a pint of milk and they also used to get a ticket — mind you your husband had to be out of work and you had to have a lot of children — to go and have a dinner. I had to go to the Albany and underground there'd be two or three great big milk churns and they'd give you a big jug of milk, more than a pint of milk, and we used to get that every day, that was a good thing. And of course they had to pay the midwife but it wasn't a lot of money, round about seven to ten shillings.

Jane Birkett



I remember sitting on the settee in the front room and this nurse came up with a push bike. I really thought she'd got the baby in the bag because I thought they come like that. "She's got it." We sat there quiet and then, when it was all over, she used to call us all up the stairs. It was lovely. We all went up the stairs. "You've got another sister", she said, because my mum had six girls; five girls before she had two boys and the last one was a girl. For my brother everything was blue. All round the bed. All the draping was white with blue and all the baby's bed was threaded with blue ribbon and we marched up to see the baby. When they put the binder round they sewed it, they didn't pin it, with a needle and cotton and you thought any minute now she's gonna stick the needle in the baby. Binding the baby's navel. Tight it was and they sewed it. I can remember it so clearly.

We used to have a lady named Mrs. Roberts that always looked after us when my mum had a baby. Stout she was, and she couldn't cook. She made an Irish stew one day, and we all went upstairs to Mum, and we was all crying. We said, "She can't cook. We can't eat it." She said, "Never mind ducks, when she's gone, you bring the vegetables up and I'll make you something".

Well then my dad used to make a suet pudding and we used to run up and say to Mum, "He's making a suet pudding. We're not going to eat it. Not with his hands." He was a bricklayer. She said, "Bring the suet up to me, and the flour and some water." And she sat up in bed and she made it. They was in bed for fourteen days in them days. After the tenth day, they'd start getting up. But we wouldn't eat our dad's suet pudding.

My mum got up on the 14th day. My mum had my brother Ted on the 1st October, and Mrs. Crouch had her Ronnie on the 20th October, so she done for my mum and

*Poplar Public Laundry*

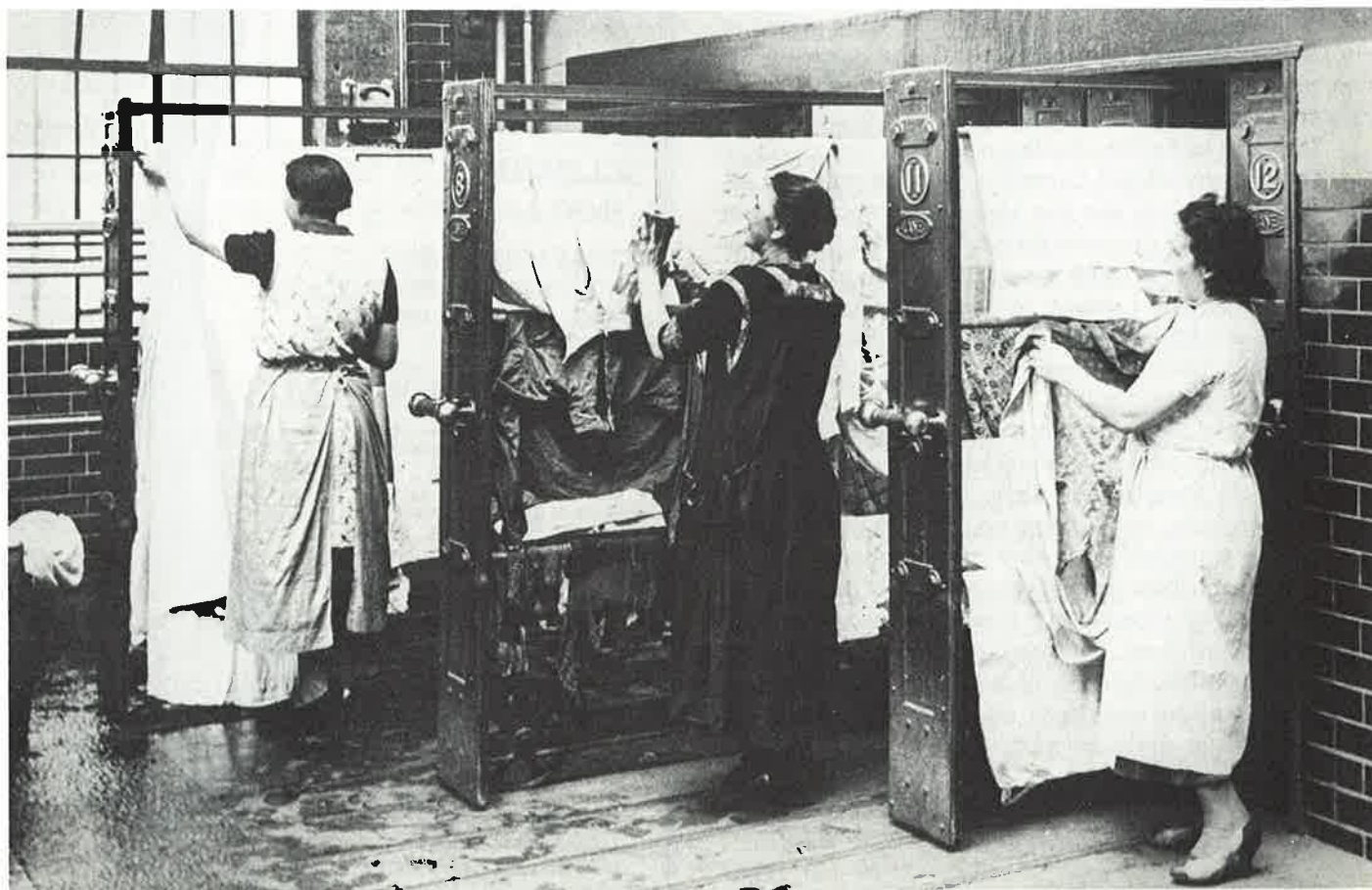
my mum done for her. She'd come in and do little bits; that's how they helped one another. She was a fortnight after my mum.

And this midwife who came in, she would come in every day. She used to bath the baby. I think she used to come in twice a day, bath the baby and look after the mums. Cos your mums seemed to live on bread and milk in them days and I know when my mum was carrying she always had butter. My dad always used to make sure she had butter where we had marge. There used to be a sweet shop in Elmers End called Francis and they used to do broken up chocolate. They'd break it all up, and we used to have to go round every Sunday when Dad come home from the pub at 3 o'clock, run round and get half a pound of Cadbury's broken milk chocolate, all for my mum.

We thought the babies came in an attache case; we really thought they came in the doctor's bag. Never give it a thought. Didn't hear anything. We used to sit ever so quiet. We never moved. No, we never used to move, and then we heard the baby cry. It's here. So excited. I used to run up the street and tell everybody, "My mum's got a baby." They used to say, "What, another one?" 'Cos she had eight. I was third from the top. I had five underneath me. I used to take them out in the pram, all the kids. I've always loved babies.

I can see my mum now, sitting on the sofa, making things. I'd say, "What are you making?" And she used to say, "Don't be query." She always used to say that. No, we didn't know nothing. The girl next door, Dorothy Crouch told me everything. I must have been about fourteen. Your mums never told you anything. Your dad used to say, "If you get in trouble, I'll shoot you and the fellow as well." Oh you daren't get in trouble.

Elsie House



When I was having my twins I went to the clinic once and I heard the doctor say they couldn't find the head. I went home, and I said, "Oh my Gawd, I got a baby with no head." I said to my husband, "What am I going to do? I got a baby with no head." So when Nurse Walkerdine came I said, "Oh nurse, what am I going to do? You don't think I'm having twins do you?" So she said, "There she goes again father!" She knew I was having twins, didn't she?

And there was me and her in the room on our own, my husband cooking mussels, and I could smell 'em. And when my Vic was born, that was the first one of the twins, I see her putting two of everything out on the cot. I said, "Oh nurse why are you putting two of everything out? What is the matter?" And she said, "Oh you know I am a one for making washing!" But she wasn't . . . then came the girl. My Gawd I was in so much shock, I couldn't feel the pain.

Everybody was crying except me. It's true everyone was crying. My sister had just lost her family in the blitz, they got killed. All crying and I thought, "What are they all crying for? It's me that's got to have them, not you." They were all shocked, you know what I mean. Fourteen and a half pounds born my twins, two normal babies. She knew I was having them, but she didn't tell me. I had her for every one of the babies except the first one. Oh she was an angel! I'd put my life in her hands. I had all the babies at home. Only the first one in hospital.

Flo Chandler

I had one of my children in the Lying-in Hospital in York Road. That's been closed for twenty years. It was purely a maternity hospital. I had my twins at home, and my other child in St. Thomas's Hospital. St. Thomas's Hospital didn't used to have a gynae ward. The nurses in the Lying-in Hospital were stricter than the nurses in St. Thomas's Hospital. Strict about no smoking and about visitors, which were only allowed between 7.30 and 8 p.m.

They also had a strict feeding routine.

They recommended Carnation milk and that was all, for the baby. I didn't like that idea and as soon as I got home I changed to Cow and Gate for him. But he kept on being sick on that, so, after a week I took him to the clinic and the doctor said I should go back to giving him Carnation milk and boiled water. In the Lying-in Hospital, they gave a lot of support to women who wanted to breast feed their babies, but I couldn't.

When I had the twins at home, they were delivered by the same doctor who had delivered me. Luckily, I didn't need to go to hospital with them. Hospitals tell you the 'right' things to do, but at home you have to get into your own routine, especially if there are others around.

You never used to hear of cancer in those days, I think there are too many chemicals in food today and everything you ate was fresh then, not frozen or canned. There was a lot of chest trouble though; there was no proper heating and the atmosphere was damp, my sister had TB, and she was told to sleep on the balcony in a bed, to get the fresh air every day.

You had to be really ill to call in the doctor; most minor things were treated at home.

Irene

Well the first thing I ever remember is my sister being born and I was about just under four. They had those monthly nurses. They were women of great experience you know that had known child birth in their own families and they'd had children themselves. The only thing that I found terrible about them was the fact that they shared the patient's bed. Before I really go any further I ought to tell you that I was born and brought up in the country so anything I tell you from my youth is very country based you see. There were people who went laying out when people died. My family wasn't well enough off to have anyone to come in and do their housework, but we had a woman who always came in for funerals, christenings, weddings, things like that, good old Mrs. Whitlock. And anything wrong in the family we'd rush round to Mrs. Whitlock and she took over the housework and general running of the house in the same way as these women went out as monthly nurses. They didn't have any training but they had lots of experience with child birth. The GP and the district nurse would come in and deliver the baby and see that everything was all right and they would probably pop in every few days or every day themselves. But this monthly nurse she stayed there and she did the housework and she looked after the mother, because remember women stayed in bed sometimes a whole month after they'd had their babies and certainly two weeks.

Alice Minett

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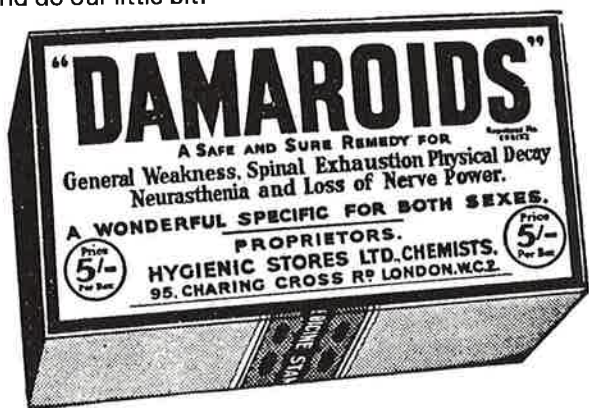


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My mother had 3 boys and 4 girls and I was the second one. I remember the others being born. I used to talk to my friend who lived across the way about it. You'd see these women with these big lumps and I couldn't understand it at all. I said where'd they get that lump from and he said "My mum says it's pigeon chested". In those days there'd be quite a lot of them like that. I thought to myself "Oh, it must be a common complaint." After a while they'd go down and you'd see them pushing a baby around. I could never understand how that came about.

In our family we used to have one born every year and 3 months — I worked it out since — the midwife would come round and do the delivery. I know there was a lot of hot water used to go in — but you never left home, you didn't go into the hospital. They were called midwives but I don't think they belonged to any professional group. They seemed to know what to do. I think they even done abortions. Certain people used to die very quick and to a child, well it's just one of them things. My mother always seemed to be having babies — it was one succession. When the baby was delivered, this woman would come in from the other end of the street and look after the kids, and then go back and look after her own — she had 14 of her own — a big fat Devonshire woman. In those days children were more adapted to cleaning — we would pile in and do our little bit.



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There was always two or three of these motherly old dears up the road that you could call on. If anyone died or if anyone was going to have a baby, they were there. If anybody died, they would come and wash and dress them up and they were laid out in state. The body would be in the front room and stayed there for a week in the coffin, but it wasn't screwed down until the undertaker called to take it away. In those days it was an everyday occurrence for somebody in the street to die.

In those days they wore the widow's weeds. They went into mourning then for about three months — all complete black. Then you went into half-mourning, which was not too bad, and so on and so on until you eventually came out with bands round your arm. The widow's weeds was a bonnet with a veil down the back.

The coffin was on a couple of trestles — the body would already be laid out by these women. The lid would go half on, but be open to view so the neighbours could walk in to pay their respects. It was frightening in those days when a person died and everybody knew about it, because the empty coffin was carried through the streets to the house and then you'd wait till the big day when the funeral came. And of course they were horse funerals with all the paraphernalia on their heads, depending how rich you were. If you had a cheap funeral you were more or less looked down on.

I saw my grandfather. There was so many of them that it didn't affect me all that much, but it gave you a feeling of uncertainty. All through my younger life I always thought if I had anything wrong with me, I'm going to die.

Jim Green

Now you've got to appreciate I come from Lambeth Walk you see, and my mum, a real cockney, she saved many a child's life seriously. The woman next door, she bred like a rabbit. Her husband used to drink, right, they used to go to bed on Sunday. I found out why when I was married. Anyway, every year my mum used to go in you know, and a couple of times the cord's been round the baby's neck. She was such a poor pathetic woman, and my mum used to do everything for her.

The real midwife, from St. Thomas's Hospital asked Mum if she would like to train. She said, "Well I couldn't put it on paper." But what she knew was as good as them.

My mother would fetch all the washing home, she had seven of us and she had all the nappies going. Nanny — put these out on the line, oh alright mum, you know, but oh yes, she did from the start to finish. It was her nature, it was you know. Yes she was lovely.

In those days you used to find someone to see you in and someone to see you out. They use to lay you out. You used to find some old lady always prepared to do the necessary.

We lived in the flats down near Blackwall Lane. Mrs. Zeales was the local midwife and she was like a nurse as well. She looked after my mum. And then if anybody died you called her in and she done all the necessary. You would give her so much for doing it. She'd done it all her life, and she was getting on, into her sixties when my brother was born in 1939.

Nan Janes



When my mother was six months pregnant we knew she was having a baby because she would go to the hospital and they would give her a letter and it would be put behind the mirror. Then when it was time to go — when the pains started — whoever was there went to the local hospital — which was University College Hospital — and down would come a student. If he could deliver it, fair enough. If he couldn't, then he went back again for another one who was a little more advanced, and if he couldn't do it, which happened in the case of my mother's last baby which was 12 and a quarter pounds, a more advanced doctor came. And there was me running the streets all night — three times during the night — you can't imagine. And in the early hours of the morning, about 5 o'clock, I went for the third time and the doctor fetched me back in his side car — motorbike sidecar. But that's how they had babies in those days. There was never ante-natal or going to the doctor or anything.

No money was ever paid to the doctors for delivering them. The money was paid to the woman that came and did the cleaning. I think you got £2/10/- and out of that you paid 30/- to the woman for a fortnight. The woman did the cleaning up and looking after for two weeks. Because you'd be kept in bed for 10 days in those days. You weren't allowed out of bed.

The old man prepared the food for himself and the kids most of the time. Although they kept you in bed for 10 days they didn't, because you were out of bed doing it, and then went back to bed when anybody was around. We would do the shopping, she would get out of bed and do it, cook a meal and then go back again. Did the father do it? No way, although what happened in his case I think, he arranged to have his yearly week off, holiday. You never got paid for holidays anyway in those days, nobody ever did, not in our sphere of life anyway. But he used to take his yearly week off at that time when she had the baby.

My mother had 8 children, one after the other, like that. And in between her having them, she was always cadging from the church people. She sent us to Sunday school, we all went to Sunday school three times a day, Sunday morning, afternoon and evening. She was always cadging off the church people you know, rags, anything she could get hold of to take round, and then when the other people had their babies, she did the job. She went and did the cleaning, she'd clean it all and wait on the doctor — to clean up and help bath the baby — this is what she did.

Well the three youngest ones all got pneumonia. All three of them at once. And I can see her now. With the youngest one it caused fits, so she had it — I can see that bowl on the table now — she had it in the bowl of mustard water. I don't know what they were doing I'm sure, but I can distinctly remember her doing that. That one died and the other two they took away to the hospital.

When I was in labour with my first child, the lady who did the cleaning up was dripping the chloroform onto the thing on my nose, and it went right through my body and the child took it as well. I was having my baby 48 years ago, at home. You didn't go into hospital, everybody had their babies at home you know. The doctor came, I

couldn't deliver it myself, he went outside to my mother and he said, "I'm sorry she can't do it, she'll have to have chloroform". And the thing was put over my face by the woman that does the cleaning up after the doctor. The doctor came from the local hospital, well not a doctor really, it was a student — you never got a doctor, just a student.

Now when I had Dennis, after the dramatic business of the first one, having the first one with all that chloroform stuff, within 18 months I was pregnant again, so I went back to the doctor. And he gave one look at me and said "No way". He didn't want to know — he didn't want to have that all over again. He'd had enough. I'd also had enough. He said, "No I wouldn't do that again, this time you must go into hospital". And I went into this Redhill Hospital in Edgeware Road. And that was dreamy, that really was. I mean that was wonderful for me.

The atmosphere was wonderful, the care, the lovely care, you looked out on to lovely gardens, clean sheets all the time, and you were waited on. That was beautiful, having the baby in that lovely hospital, it was a real memory.

Phyllis Heiser

I think I was one of the first babies to be born in the British Hospital for Mothers and Babies. I always remember my mum telling me that they took her in labour to hospital on a tram, and her waters broke on the tram. Just imagine it, and I mean heavy labour with me. I was a huge baby. It's unthinkable, isn't it?

Joan Welch

I remember my mum, my daddy, my brother Frank and me, we all slept in one bedroom upstairs. Frank and me slept on the floor, we were only young, we slept together. Bessie used to sleep downstairs on the sofa. I said to my Mother, "Why is Bessie's belly big like that Mum?" and she smacked my face and said, "Don't ask questions." So then one night my father said to my mum, "Jane, the girl's calling you." And when she went down of course she was starting. There used to be an old lady, a very old lady named of Mrs. Cook — I remember it as if it was today — well she was a midwife. She come and brought him into the world. So we all had to go downstairs. It was early in the morning, so they could put her in my mother's bed to be delivered.

Molly

My first girl, when she was born, I had to do everything. I had to bath her because the wife was frightened that she would drop it. Do everything like that. Years ago they used to have a body belt, and I had to sew that on cos she was frightened to dig the needle in the baby.

George Taylor

I can tell you when my son was born I had twins; a little girl of one and a half pounds and the boy was two pounds. When my mother came in she said, "I'm taking the baby home, otherwise he'll die." So my mother took him home. She wrapped him in cotton wool and he wasn't bathed for a year, only with olive oil.

My son would have died definitely, he would have died. Because all my children were tiny, I had three lots of twins, and lost one every time, and then the last little boy died, so I only had one boy. He's 40 now.

It was just the lack of care, there wasn't the staff there to care for the babies. It was my mother's care that looked after my boy. Yes, he wasn't bathed, only just done down in olive oil. I had milk fever, so Mum was left to cope with the lot. She brought him up and I was very grateful for her doing that for me.

Eileen Farrow

I suppose I was born sickly. Perhaps mum didn't have the right food when she was pregnant. I expect that was half the trouble. When my sister was born, she was younger than me, she looked as though she came from a

different family. She had bright red hair and a rosy face, a fat little girl, and my brother came along about 12 years later and he was quite healthy too. So I think it was just unfortunate that I was born at a time when my parents were particularly hard up and I think that she probably hadn't the right food when she was pregnant.

I vaguely remember my sister being born. There was an old lady lived opposite us who acted as a midwife. Whether she was actually qualified as a midwife I wouldn't like to say. And she also did laying out and that sort of thing. She came to help when my sister was born and apparently mum had a hard time. I don't know what I was doing, but something wrong obviously, because my father slapped me and mum got so upset that apparently she nearly died, and dad swore that he'd never lift his hand to any of us again and he never did, not ever.

There was someone in the street who'd act as a midwife. She wasn't terribly clean looking. She never gave me the appearance later on in life of being particularly wholesome, shall we say. But she came in and she did all the laying out of our old Great Aunt who had been living in our house and died there.

Dorothy Barton

ix.

NURSING NOTES.

JULY, 1925.

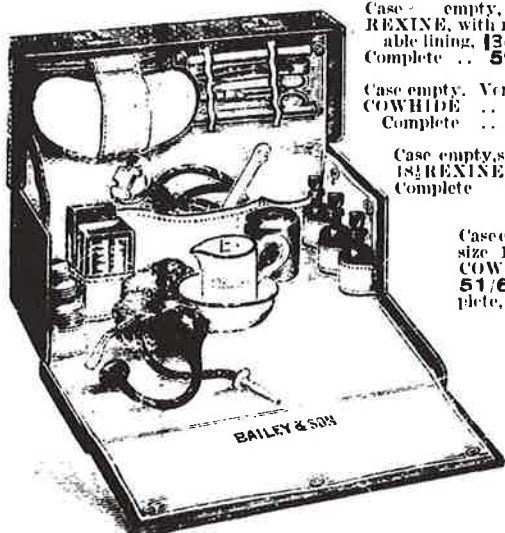
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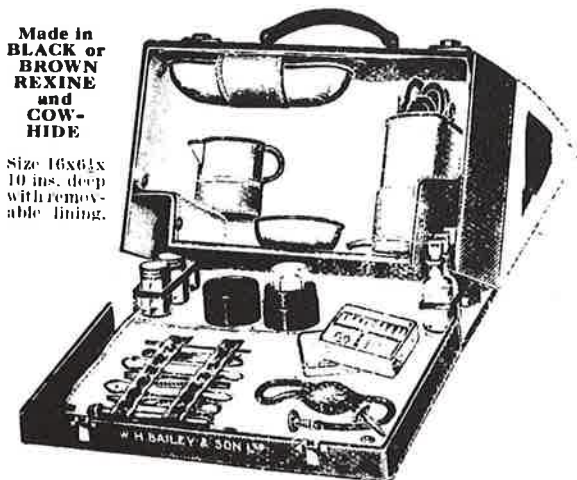
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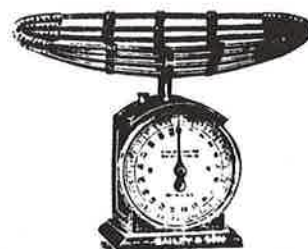
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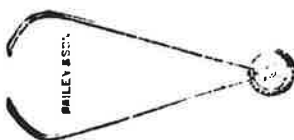


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In 1935 Lambeth Hospital was a proper workhouse, you had workhouse conditions. When I had my first baby in there I was just put on to a bare board, on trestles, right by a cold window, to have my baby, and that was in January.

If you lived in Lambeth, you see that was a very very poor area, so you were treated as such. That's a tragedy really, when you think about it. You lived in Lambeth, and because everybody was poor, they thought that's all you were used to, and that's all you were entitled to. You lived in the area and so that's how you got treated. I was by myself all the time, until almost the last minute, I called for the nurse, and she came in, and the baby was due to be born. She called in another nurse, and they both delivered my baby, and they just wrapped it up and put me back into bed — not even washed or anything else. The next morning I had clean sheets put on the bed, and had a blanket bath, and I was allowed to see the baby. You didn't have them by your bed at that time. They were kept away from you, except at feeding times. And they almost forced you to feed your baby, whether you could or not. Well I couldn't. All the six children I've had I haven't been able to feed them, and they've all been brought up on the bottle. My second one I had at home, at Cole House. The midwife there was very very good, and I had my other daughter — she was only two and a half years old when my other one was born. Well then, I had a big gap before the third was born, and she was old enough to shop and do housework and everything else. I went into Lambeth Hospital for the third one, and the terrific change in the hospital you would never believe. There's a lot of difference in the place.

One of my children was born in Yorkshire. When I had the midwife up north, my husband had to go out at two o'clock in the morning, and he didn't know where he was because we had only just moved up there. And I felt that my second baby was ready up there. My mother explained to him where to go for the midwife, and what to say to her, and he said, "She's losing blood and water." "Don't you dare say that to the midwife!" my mother says to my husband. She thought it was terrible for him to even mention that to her. The midwife came, she examined me, and she said, "I can't deliver this, you'll have to have a doctor." Well the doctor came, and when they finally got the child away, the doctor says, "My God, where did you get this one from? There's nothing of you". And it was 12 and half pounds when they weighed it. That was a boy.

It seemed as though I was in labour for days, but I suppose it must have been just hours. You know it was difficult. By the time the doctor came I was in real agony. Because I was having the labour pains, but I couldn't push. And the nurse kept saying to me "Don't withdraw", and I was gasping for breath and she was saying "Breathe out not in" and this sort of thing. And I was afraid to push in case it hurt and it did. That birth was about the vilest I had, with a nurse and a doctor.

Dolly Davey

#### *Home confinement*





I had my first baby during the war. And you know my mother was very much against me having it at home. I suppose she was partly worried about me being in a bombing situation. There was this wonder scheme run by Westminster Hospital. They evacuated you about three or four weeks before the baby was due. I can remember going up there all of us with our fat tums getting into the coach, but I felt very isolated then and a bit nervous because, you know, your first baby in particular, and at the same time one of my brothers was missing, believed killed. So there was a lot of anxiety.

Funny my mother always said she wanted to be a midwife but she wasn't going to allow me to have the baby at home. I think she was scared. But she came up to see me off, which was ridiculous. I was twenty-three and she said to two of the other women, girls my age, "Look after her will you?" I think she felt a bit bad that she was sending me off. We went down to Guildford, One Tree Hill in Surrey, a beautiful summer it was. We used to go out shopping in Guildford all us large women you know. I think the people down there all thought they were babies that we'd had on the side. They thought we were all unmarried, that we'd been making free you know.

We stayed in a house that had been an artist's house. It was lovely, and on our little ward, there were about eight of us. We had gorgeous food there. We used to try and get the recipes from the cook, but she wouldn't give them to us.

Matron who was in charge of our little One Tree Hill she was always hoping that one of us would have it quickly and she'd have to deliver it. After about three weeks, those of us who were still there had to go by coach down to Hindhead, in Surrey and again Matron had all her things in the back hoping that one of us might do something on the journey. The person I made friends with down there, we still keep contact. She and I used to go for a walk every morning, have a glass of milk at the dairy, come back, have lunch, take the compulsory rest in the afternoon and then she and I would always go for another walk after that in the evening. I'm sure it kept us fit and that was my easiest confinement.



*Midwife and bicycle*

We were as brown as berries. They were getting a bit fed up with us. I'd been away six and a half weeks, so they decided they'd give me the old castor oil and hot baths treatment. They just finally said, "Well you know we think we ought to see if we can do something about this." So I had to sit in the bath. The matron brought me this castor oil and orange juice. I had to drink about half a pint of that and it wasn't very nice. She kept splashing my tummy with his warm water. In the middle of the night sure enough I was getting these pains.

I woke up and I said, "I don't know whether it's the castor oil or whether it's it." So my friend went to get the matron. I must have been bearing down. She said, "Yes right", rushed in, took me downstairs, made a cup of tea while she rang for the ambulance. The ambulance lost its way, and I was nearer than I thought. But it was the easiest birth. They had this system there that the students did the delivery with a midwife. The day I had my baby they'd all got their finals so I had six doctors.

I said, "What is it?" They said it was a girl, and I burst out crying. They said, "Didn't you want a girl?" I said, "Yes, but I didn't think I'd get one, having five brothers you see. It was a wonderful experience altogether down there.



Margaret Kippen.

## FRESH AIR CURES

I was very very sickly. I wasn't expected to live. But my mother was very determined young woman, and she was determined to keep me alive, and I'm sure that was the only reason sometimes I did go on living because she was determined I wouldn't die.

Well I had some chest or lung complaint or they thought that I might have TB. Every winter when you had those thick yellow fogs I used to start coughing about October and go on all through the winter, and I had double pneumonia three times before I was eight. Every winter I had these terrible chest coughs, I couldn't breathe and I was forever at home in bed or going to hospitals. We had an old doctor, lovely old doctor he was, he lived somewhere in New Cross, I used to see him frequently and he used to keep a jar of sweets on his desk and every time I went I'd have one of these sweets.

They put straw down outside the house in the street so that the traffic, the carts going right by wouldn't disturb me. He had weird ideas, this doctor that I had. He used to travel around in a pony and trap. He was very old fashioned, quite an elderly man at the time, and he ordered this straw to be put down. When I was about four, I was sent to a convalescence home out in the country. He listened to me with a stethoscope, thumped my back and things, and he said that we really ought not to live in London. Well, as my father worked in Surrey Docks, it was a bit difficult not to. I was made to have Codliver Oil

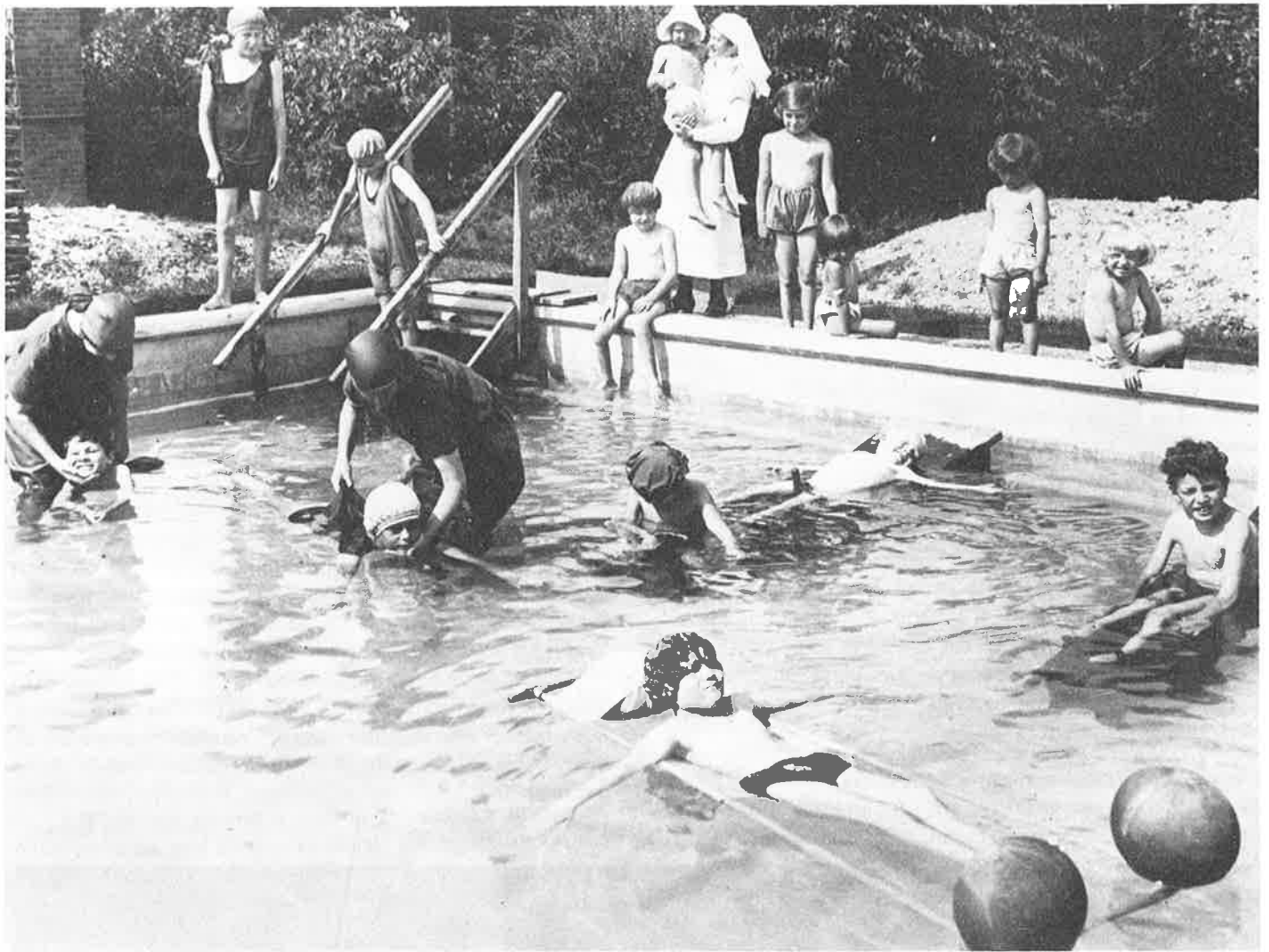
*Stanmore Orthopaedic Hospital: Open air treatment c.1930*

and Malt. My mother used to get a big bottle from the hospital, like an old sweet jar full of thick Codliver Oil and Malt, and I used to have this two or three times a day. My chest and back was rubbed with camphorated oil every night, I used to walk about smelling of this stuff, hot poultices on my chest; nothing really did any good. When I was eight I had another very bad attack of double pneumonia and I was sent away to Brighton for six months because the doctor said that I wouldn't live through another winter in London.

There were homes that dealt entirely with children, poor children and we were all poor. We went by train and were looked after by the guard in the train you know, and then taken to the home in taxis by the nurses and they were marvellous. They would take us out for walks whatever the weather was like, and sometimes it was so windy that, I was a little thin thing, well frequently you know we were blown over because we couldn't stand up. But they made us do it and we were covered in chillblains, and it was a dreadful winter.

We were in the open air every day, twice a day we were taken for a walk. Some of the children were very badly clothed. I mean they hadn't any idea what to wear. Some of the boys had no coats and they used to wrap us up at home before we went out in anything they could lay their hands on. They had great big chests full of garments, scarves and gloves wrapped round and pinned on us. A





*Children's Swimming Bath at Queen Mary's Carshalton c.1930*

motley crew we must have looked!

But they were very good indeed and I think all this fresh air and good healthy food really broke the back of my illness. We had a lot of milk, hot milk and cocoa and things like that, and short walks to start with until we got used to it, and then longer walks every day. We had good hot food. I think really that basically that was what most of us needed you know; that and the fresh air.

I went there at the beginning of October and they had put on a fireworks display and then we had a marvellous Christmas. I got home the following March. My family were astonished at the difference in me. I think really that was all I needed, fresh air and good healthy food, but fresh air mostly because it was the London fogs that were killing me.

They were very firm and very kind but they were used to dealing with not very well off children. They wouldn't stand any nonsense you know. Some of the nurses were a little bit scathing about what some of the children were wearing and I really resented this you know. But the Matron was very good there, she took a particular interest in me.

They had little groups, teachers came in every day and they sat us in groups according to our age at first. And when they discovered how you got on they moved you up to the older groups. They had lessons every day, and I found that quite interesting. Reading, writing and arithmetic, just that, reading writing and arithmetic which was

really quite enough when you are recovering from an illness, I suppose. We had to write every week to our parents. The matron would read our letters, check what we'd written and then she would write on the bottom how much we weighed and what we'd gained so that they would know.

Matron let me sit in her office and she let me read her own books. She used to talk to me and I think really in a way those six months proved the turning point in my life. She used to talk to me about all sort of things, about education and how it was possible to get out of one's environment. Well I didn't understand it all, but I guessed; I knew what she was getting at. She influenced my life very much indeed, but when I came back my sister used to laugh at me because I talked posh. But my parents encouraged me as much as they could.

Dorothy Barton

They used to take the children to St. Mary's Hospital at Carshalton, the open air hospital, you know. I had a daughter Joan, she had rheumatic fever. I used to take her to Carshalton, and she was there for a year. I used to have to go and see her once a fortnight. I had to sit and peel a bag of onions all night to get 10/- to go and see her, cos there was no work. I used to sit up all night crying my eyes out. It was worth it though.

Dolly Harrison



## FRESH AIR TREATMENT

I had a very bad chest when I was a child. I lived in Knockholt Road on the Page Estate in Eltham, and there was a doctor called Dr. Buchanan, lived almost opposite to us. He told my mother that the only way I would get rid of this cough was to go to a special school. Well there was one up Plum Lane, in Eaglesfield, an open air school.

I had to get up early in the morning, go to Woolwich by tram, then take the bus to Birds Nest Hollow and then walk up to Plum Lane School, where we had breakfast laid on for us, in one of the school halls. From there they used to crocodile us right up into the woods up Shooters Hill. There was no kind of school bus or anything in those days to take us there. You had to make your own way, on all these buses. I think we were all like walking wounded. From what I can remember we all had to make our own way. I mean there may have been mothers that pushed them in wheelchairs. I can't remember that part.

The school was two bungalows with sliding doors, which could be opened when the weather was good. We used to do the ordinary lessons, not anything extraordinary, not any sports or anything like that, not geometry, just the three R's. Round these bungalows, there were slats, and if we did anything wrong, you see they couldn't cane us because we were physically ill children, so they made us walk round and round these slats for a punishment.

*Violet Melchett Infant Welfare Centre 1931*

Every afternoon they made us lie on camp beds, covered us with a blanket and we had to go to sleep. And because my cough was very bad I can remember that I used to be exiled into the woods in a deckchair, very often because I used to keep the others awake.

Dinner time we had to walk back to Plum Lane and have a meal, and then before we went home in the evening we had another; we had a tea. Then of course I had to get to Eltham again on the way home.

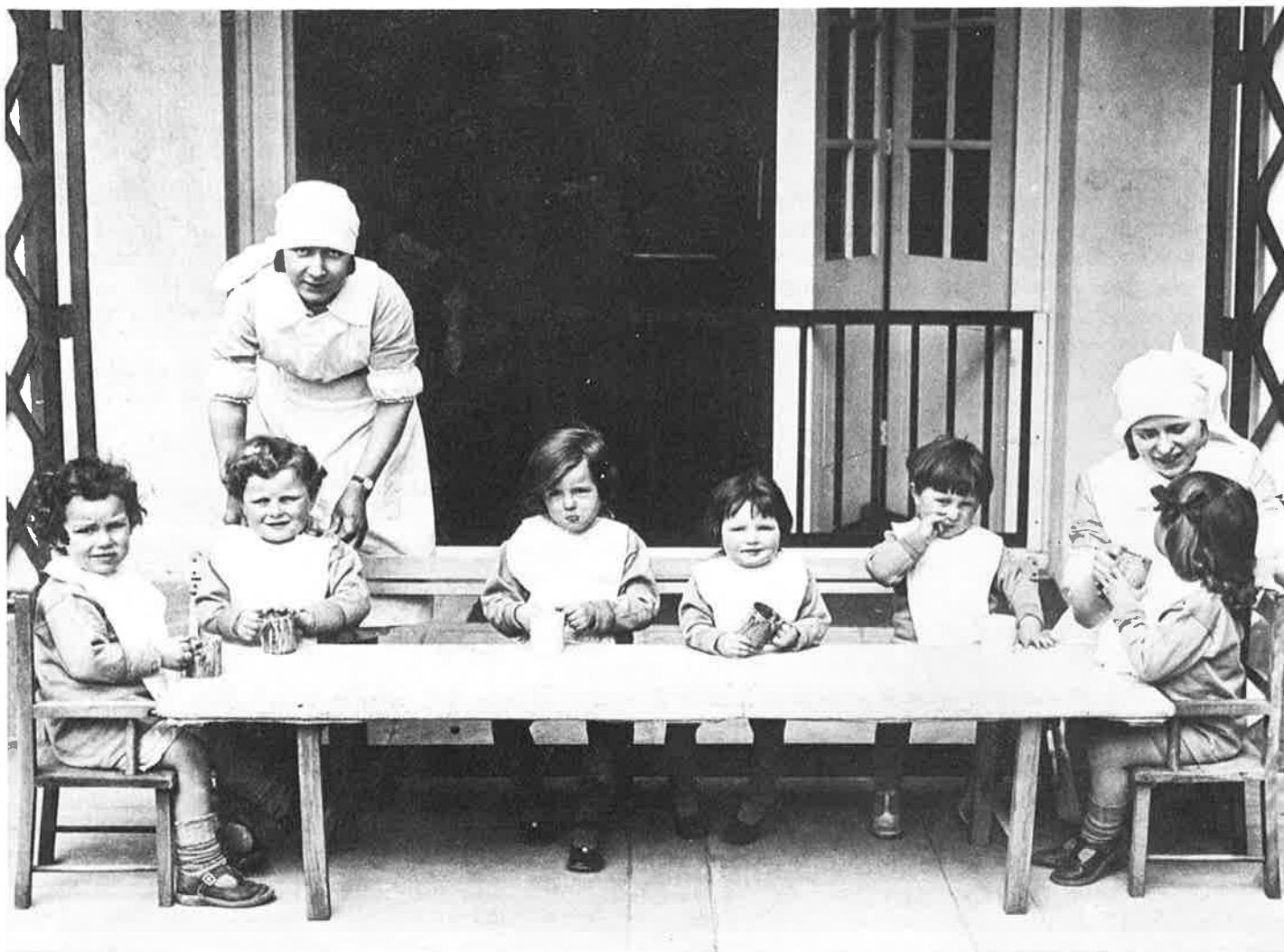
Ivy Ellis

At the McMillans camp school the first things we were taught were personal hygiene and good manners. I remember we had our own flannel and towel hung up on our own hook, and our own toothbrush. Our coats were also hung on a hook. We never did many lessons, mostly games. We also had lots of stories told to us by the nurses.

I remember after dinner it was rest time and for this the tables we had our dinner on were turned upside down, then a piece of canvas with round brass rings on each corner these went over the legs four of them, thus forming a hammock. We rested for about one and a half hours. When we got up we were given a glass of milk.

The day was from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. The nurses who looked after us came from well-to-do families from all over the world. It was voluntary work. The class rooms were all open because Margaret McMillan believed in open air to get fresh air.

Pat Martin





*Nursery School early 20's. The slide was given to the Nursery School by an American.*

I was taken to Rachel McMillan Nursery School by my mother as a baby of two and I left when I was 14. I went there in 1917, aged 2 years. Mother was a cook in a big house for a doctor. I went home to my aunt who looked after me during the week, and Mum used to come home weekends.

I remember paying a shilling a week for breakfast, dinner and tea and after your dinner you lay down on the bed and slept for about an hour and had your lessons in the afternoon. We used to leave school about half past four.

There were a lot of children really. Princess Mary was our President, and Lady Astor and George Bernard Shaw our criticsers when we were getting older in school. We did a lot of acting. I don't remember a lot about it. Only going to the Lewisham High Road Congregational Church doing the plays. We done Cranford . . . all Shakespeare, loads of Shakespeare. We had to write to the Mayoress to come and see the play, that was 1928.

Miss McMillan she was in a wheel chair when she came, she was very kind, but you had to do what you were told, she was very strict but very nice.

First thing in the morning, you went to your teacher for register, then straight down into the bathroom. Big bathrooms they were. You had to clean your teeth, wash yourself whether you needed it or not — some poor little kids they had to have a bath — and then you had to go back up there to the big room and the nurse used to be there and she'd do your hair, comb it all, put your ribbon on same colour as your dress. They made the uniform but we had to embroider all round the yoke. You had to take your own clothes off, like your dress, or if suitable the uniform used to go over the top of your clothes.

We were given a spoonful of malt, then your milk, as much milk as you liked, milk, bread or whatever you liked but always your head was done. You always had to clean your teeth whether you wanted to or not, whether you'd already cleaned them you had to clean them again.

Breakfast was mostly brown bread or white bread and butter or porridge, that's if you wanted it, but it was always there. Dinner used to have stews, never fish and chips, boiled fish and you always had a sweet for afters,

rice mostly, milk puddings or currant puddings. Then for tea you'd have bread and butter, and jam and your milk again and milk at dinner time. You were well fed for a shilling a week.

We used to go away for 2 weeks at Dunmow Essex. Lady Warwick had a castle, and two years running we stayed in the castle and the last time we went there we camped in the field. The thing I remember most was when she had us in her music room and she was going to sing to us and we saw her come down the big staircase, she had a coronet on and we thought she was the Queen . . . Lady Warwick. She must have been closely involved with the school like Lady Astor and Bernard Shaw.

Lady Astor and Bernard Shaw used to criticise. They used to come round and look at our books. They went to the teachers afterwards but they'd say something to you. Mostly Lady Astor always had something to say, but Bernard Shaw didn't.

Margaret McMillan started to teach us French when we were six, then you wouldn't have any more for a long time, if she was ill. Greek she started us on, algebra, but it never got me anywhere. She taught me the piano. That was on my own, only me. I carried on with it quite a time. She had to stop, I don't know if she was ill or she had to go away again. She gave me a book, that was 1926, because I'd done a composition and I did it right. She gave me a great big book, "The Water Babies", and in the front she'd written "To my darling Edna from Dame Margaret McMillan". I know she left one of the boys something in her will for his education. I was happy there and always liked it there.

We used to go to the Old Vic quite often, not to watch but to go behind the scenes. The actors used to talk to us about Shakespeare's plays. I remember we put on a play called The Builders. That was good because we had to build our own shed with wood and nails in the garden of the school. We used to do quite a lot of plays in the Congregational Church and the money we got for them helped to buy our books. Taming of the Shrew, Midsummer Night's Dream, Cranford, Builders. Miss McMillan produced these, she did everything.

When the children first came they used to have what we called apparatus, like jig-saws fitting in, wooden ones and squares and then perhaps another group would sit round and would have nursery rhymes. This went on in the afternoon; they would go round the garden and perhaps have a nature study if it was nice weather but it was more or less all singing and just little lessons. Our prayer that we used to sing when the children had had their tea was Bless This House.

At dinner time the children used to sit down at all these little tables and after dinner they used to have their rest. We used to have to put out these little camp beds with all the little blankets and that's when we used to take it in turns to go and have our dinner, but there was always one left on duty, but they nearly always used to have a little snooze. Then before they left they used to have little tables with about six or eight sitting round them and then they used to have bread and butter and a piece of cake and milk again before they went, and the most any of them paid in my day was two shillings a week. Some of them didn't even pay that, they might pay sixpence depending on how poor the family were or how many children they had there. There was only about 11 months between some of the poor little loves.

A lot of the mothers were at work, they used to collect them after work, but they could always get them before and they were all mostly gone by half past five. Just after tea. They'd had their tea.

Sometimes there was seven or eight children in one family, and all the families lived round about Deptford. They might have come from Greenwich way but not all that far. Walter Raleigh buildings was another place I used

to remember. That was more down the river side, that was very damp. The children from those flats used to suffer from bad chests. One little boy we lost him, Billy Long. He used to have terrible fits and we used to have to rush around and put him in a mustard bath. He died. He couldn't have been five even, because they were only there from two to five but he was a lovely little boy.

There was a clinic just at the back of the school, so if you were on clinic duty you used to go round all the shelters and collect the children that had to go to the clinic. We used to take their little clothes off — well they used to have baths, a very shallow bath it was, and we used to just bath them and then dress them again. Some of their little bodies where the fleas used to come out of the walls, their poor little bodies I used to cry. I used to wake up in the night seeing these little kiddies. You used to put a little bit of lical in the shallow baths and they used to thoroughly enjoy it, they loved it, splashing about in the water.

And Margaret McMillan she used to love her children. She was rather a good pianist. She would come into the shelter and each had a piano in it, because they used to have their little singing lessons and there was always a student who could play the piano. She used to come in and sit down. She used to like the children to sing different nursery rhymes, and the children used to love it. They'd all sit on the floor and she used to be there for ages playing the nursery rhymes, old ones. We used to act Jack and Jill went up the hill. You'd act; one would be Jack one would be Jill and they'd have a little bucket between them. And Humpty Dumpty sat on the wall. They used to like doing that one because they got their little stools. They always

*c.1922. Nursery School Garden — children sleeping on cots in the open.*







made amusement and the day used to pass much better for them than if they'd been stuck at home or being looked after — well they had their meals and they were a lovely lot of kiddies. The younger ones sometimes through the dampness of the buildings they used to have very bad chests and Miss McMillan was always fighting for them.

There was one of these shelters that was on its own. They were children who were suffering and they were educated there. One had asthma very bad indeed. Another one was a little cripple girl, had her legs in irons. It was different illnesses that Miss McMillan was interested in. They had schooling just the same but they wasn't pushed around. They used to be attended to by the doctors. If any of the children were off sick, you used to have to go around the different houses to find out what was the matter with the child. And we came back and reported it. They might have just been off for a cold, they used to get the doctor, get attention and they didn't have to pay. There used to be a special place down in Kent somewhere and Margaret McMillan used to send some of the children down there to a convalescent home and they used to go down there to stop for so many months until they got better, and that all used to come out of the McMillan fund.

My mother used to say to our neighbours, "Don't ever throw any clothes away, my Mary will take them to Deptford where she is." Well you used to rig a little kiddy out on a Friday night with all this nice stuff. On Monday they'd come in without it. We'd walk round the corner where there were two or three pawn shops and we used to go looking for the things.

When Queen Mary was going to open the college the

children all had new overalls. Then another department store, I think it was Chiesmans, they supplied every little girl with a great big bow ribbon, and a couple of shoe shops in Deptford all gave them new sandals, another one gave them a new pair of socks and they were all rigged out. It was lovely.

You know Christmas time when the children, somebody would always send in so many tins of biscuits and perhaps the bakers would send in buns and cakes. The owners of those shops in those days their children had gone or been to the nursery school and they used to pay back in this way. They knew what good was being done for the children.

Just before Christmas the mothers used to take it in turns and one would be standing outside and they used to collect all the halfpennies and pennies and as much as they could afford. The two years I was there they gave Miss McMillan an umbrella, a little gold plate round it with her name on it, and the other year it was a pen. She thought the world of these presents. The parents took it in turn — didn't matter if it was snow or rain they still collected that money.

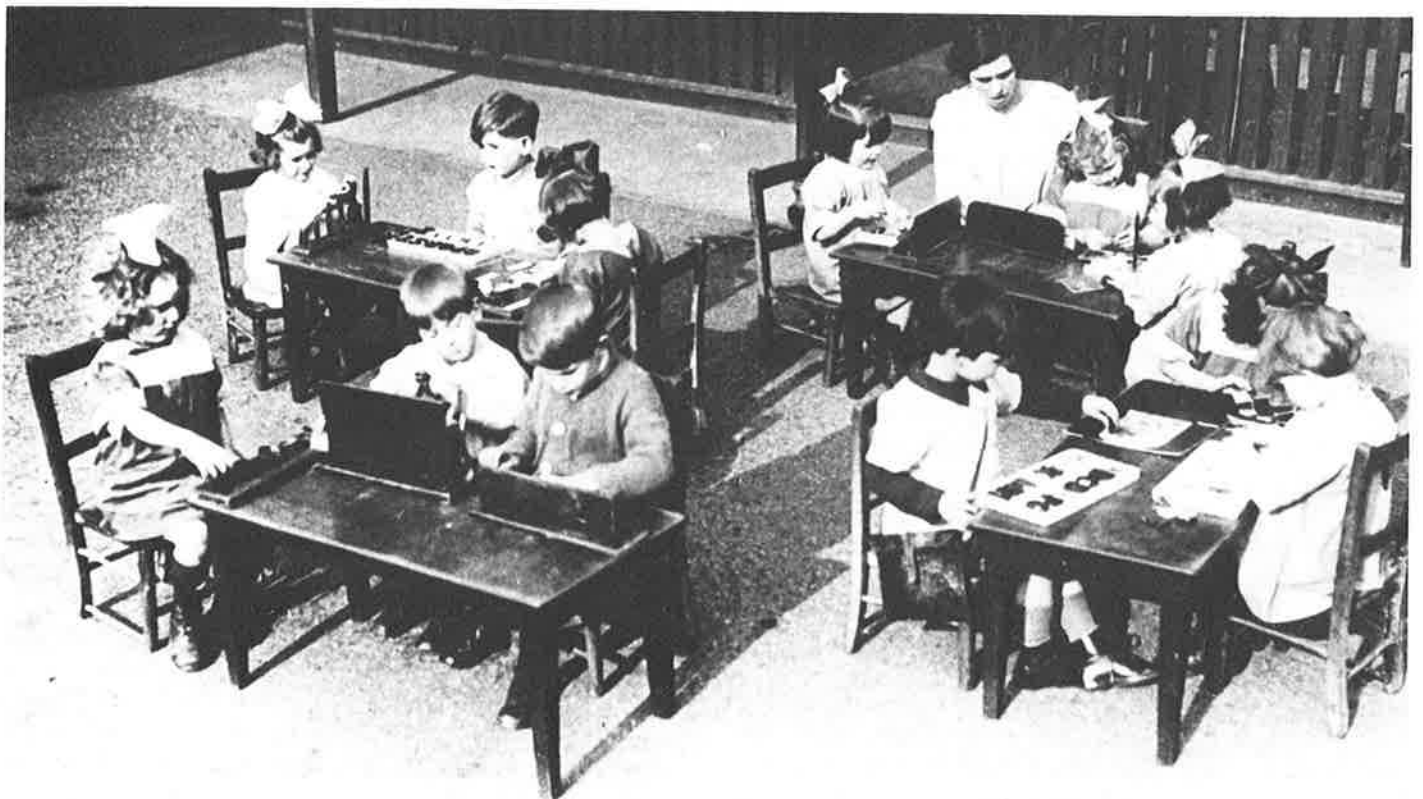
I loved my two years there. People used to say to my mother, "Fancy you letting Mary go to Deptford!" People use to think it was such a terrible place and my mother used to say, "Don't you let my Mary hear you say that because she thinks the world of the Deptford people." You only had to go up the High Street, walk up and people would say, "Hello nurse", and stick an apple in your hand, or if you went in a shop, "Oh hello nurse".

Mary Warner



*c.1914. Nursery School children being washed in the garden of Evelyn House.*

*Late 1920's (or early 30's) Nursery School children playing with educational toys out of doors.*





*May 8th 1930. Queen Mary and mothers of the Nursery School children — students on the right in uniform. On the occasion of the opening of the Rachel McMillan Training College.*

When my mother and I went to Rachel McMillan Training College for my interview, the bus conductor was very concerned why two such respectable ladies should be going to the slum area of Deptford.

The old house in Alberly Street was quite eerie and had an atmosphere. The nurses as we were called were always respected in an area of such fighting and quarrelling and squalor. We were never molested or attacked.

Deptford High Street shops. I have memories of shops with large size trays outside with live eels in them, cut price sweets and chocolates, barrows with strawberries at 4d (old price) a pound, a little cafe where we strained our pocket money supply to have a coffee occasionally.

We used to love to walk down to Greenwich through the park to a little cafe where Italians served delicious coffee and walnut cake, a rare treat. A park in the opposite direction, I can't remember it's name, had a lovely open air swimming pool. Entry was free and it was used a lot by all keen swimmers.

I remember Margaret McMillan at the college, floating about in large loose black clothing, emanating her wonderful charisma. I still shiver whenever I hear the hymn "Oh love that will not let me go." The students were in the very cold dusty church, just her coffin there, rehearsing the hymns the day before the funeral, and then on the following day the church was filled with flowers and people came to pay tribute to this wonderful woman.

One of my first jobs as a student in the nursery school, I was given a comb and a bowl of disinfectant and told to "do" the boys' heads. I hadn't the faintest idea what I was looking for — NITS.

Children arrived in such drear drab clothes, almost rags, some were sewn into them. After a bath they were decked in bright overalls, sandals and hair ribbons.

Sometimes rice pudding was served to the children with sultanas in it. I remember two children pretending they were fleas and catching them and squashing them. One very prolific, very poor family, very scrawny, produced endless babies and they were all named after royalty. I remember Margaret Rose arriving.

When Bernard Shaw visited the school, a small boy grabbed his beard and shouted "Beaver!"

A small new child would not stop crying. Everything possible was offered and even through the tears she sobbed "I want a sup of me dad's beer."

Part of our work was to get friendly with one special child and the family. One day, visiting my "special" family, I was offered a cup of tea with apologies that she hadn't got any cows milk. "Whatever else is there?", I thought, and finally found out it was some imported tinned milk, cost 2d a tin.

Joan Holifield.



## SCHOOL CLINICS

We used to have these clinics and have examinations as children. If they were found to be under-weight they were given sunlight treatment. And I remember the children going off for sunlight treatment and I was thinking I wouldn't go for that because I was fat, fatty Arbuckle.

We had a nurse who used to go through your hair with a steel comb. Mum had a horrifying experience with me getting a dirty head when I went to school. I came home and my hair was covered in nits and mum just went and chopped it. I had lovely curly hair and mum just chopped my hair off. Well she wouldn't go to the hair-dresser you know and say, "Well cut my daughter's hair." She just cut it, and after that I remember mum going through my hair. She had a little double very fine comb, a scurf comb I think they were called, and she used to go through my hair at home on a piece of newspaper.

Joan Welch



*Wandsworth Medical Centre Operating Room 1911*

At school we always had a nurse come round to look in your head to see whether — she'd look in your head and go up the back of your neck to see if you had any marks of where the fleas had bitten you, we had all that in school. Nitty Nora.

Jane Birkett

At school we used to have this Codliver Oil and Malt stuff as well, if you came from a poor family in the infants school where I went, I found that demoralising. At certain times during the day morning break I suppose, you had to queue up at the teacher's desk and get your Codliver Oil and Malt you know out of this tube, this big jar which she ladled from one to the other regardless, but only if you came from certain homes. You had to go up and have this and I really resented having to go out and stand there and get this stuff, given to me. I knew I was poor, so did everyone else, but I didn't think I wanted my nose rubbed in it. It tasted of fish and it was like very dark brown runny toffee.

So that we wouldn't get lice in our hair, every Thursday night we had greasy muck rubbed into our hair and we had to go to school with it on Friday and it was washed out Friday evening so our hair was clean and sparkling for the weekend. A lot of girls at school had it done because it was a way of preventing picking up things in the head. I assume it did work because we didn't get anything. That was when you had a nurse come round every so often to go through your hair to see if you weren't carrying any nits. Yes, Nitty Nora.

Dorothy Barton



*Hair disinfection 1930's*

In 1912 I can remember the school nurse, because on one horrifying occasion she found I had got nits in my hair, and my poor mother had to deal with them with a small tooth comb and we all knew that one particular family in the school was a bit dirty, so after that I for one didn't play with them.

I left school and I went into the London County Council Service as a general grade clerk, and was appointed to a local office, where we made appointments for those children who'd been found to need treatment at



*School Treatment Centre, Hackney 1930's*

school medical inspections. Every child had an inspection once a year. It was a pretty comprehensive School Health Service in those days. We used to have lots of visitors at County Hall from other countries to learn about it.

When War started, all the children were evacuated so the School Health Service was closed down, and I was sent to work in Dulwich Hospital. I was given the job of looking after the patients' ration books.

Then after the war I came back to the School Health Service, helping start it up again. I had a few full time Medical Officers and a whole panel of part timers and these were GPs who gave us some sessions of their time.

Before the war, I was involved in the Mental Deficiency section. I had to arrange for the visits by the Medical Officers to these patients who were in the care of the Brighton Guardianship Society. Mental patients were placed on farms and places like that where they were taught simple farming jobs, and we inspected them by a Health Visitor or a Medical Officer every so often to make sure they were all right, and I remember the report always said, "Defective, perfectly happy." I was always amused by the one who managed to steal or save enough money to buy himself a bicycle, and I thought, well he's not so silly if he's able to do that.

I was put in charge of the Home Help Service, and the recuperative holidays. I rather enjoyed that too because I was in direct contact with the public, patients used to come in and I would go into the details of what they wanted, where they wanted to go, you got a recuperative holiday, if you'd had a recent acute illness, now if you had a chronic condition or you'd been hospitalised, you were usually sent for convalescence which was free, the recuperative holiday was subject to an assessed charge.

Where I did do rather well was that I managed to consult patients as to the kind of holiday they wanted, country or seaside and so on, and I got quite a few accolades for making them feel they were wanted and cared for. There were holiday homes and on the whole the patients enjoyed themselves, I certainly remember Fairby Grange in Kent because I went there myself, when Johnny was born I was already 42 years old and a very small first birth. We lived in a top flat which was 78 stairs to carry a baby up and down. I felt exhausted because I'd had a caesarian operation so they sent me for this recuperative holiday and my predecessor on the job sent me to Fairby Grange.

I liked working with the public, and again the sense of satisfaction, the old boy who brought me back a stick of rock from Bognor because he was so grateful, and another patient who brought me in a box of strawberries, and I wasn't allowed to accept gifts, but I must admit I hid the stick of rock, but the strawberries were rather open so I said you come home to tea with me and help me eat them, and one of the doctors gave me a box of biscuits at Christmas so I had to say come to the office tea this afternoon and we shared the biscuits, I've still got the tin. Because of course one wasn't allowed it in case there was any bribery involved. A threepenny stick of rock!

When I got on to School Health and I was really working all out, I know one of the doctors came to see me in the office and he said I don't know how you do it, you've got one hand holding the phone to your ear, and other one writing and you're turning around talking to somebody else, you are doing three things at once, and that's what I enjoyed, the sense of being stretched. On the whole it was satisfying, a satisfying career to have been in.

## THE NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE

*The National Health Service was central to what the Labour Government was trying to do to change society. It was a living piece of socialism because what it said was: "Never mind whether you are poor, penniless, an old age pensioner, or the richest in the land, you shall have an equal right to fight pain and death. And you won't pay at the point of use. Nobody's going to stand over you and ask for your cheque book before they'll operate."*

*It was very exciting, and the excitement was being encouraged and increased by the opposition of some sections of the medical profession who saw this as an attack on their entrenched rights to earn what they liked out of people's illnesses. So it was to us part of the socialist battle that the 1945 government was conducting.*

Barbara Castle

I was never actively campaigning for a National Health Service, but I used to attend all the meetings where the discussions took place and deciding on different votes and that sort of thing, the way they should go, and of course welcoming every proposal that was coming along.

We thought what a wonderful thing it was to narrow the gaps between the rich and the poor, because I'd had my experience of managing as a poor person and thinking, or even knowing, how much better off other children would be where there was money in the family.

In every way that we could, we helped to produce that National Health Service with the aid of other supporters round us and the pamphlets that we delivered and the way we talked to other people and eventually as you know it took place.

From then on I've seen a lot where the funds have been misappropriated. For instance, I objected to the way the dentists used to want you to have so and so simply because it was costing more money although to my mind it wasn't necessary, and again particularly with opticians. In my husband's own case they insisted on more than one occasion on him having two pairs of glasses and he never needed any glasses other than when he was reading, never in his life, but they told him he must have the two which to my mind was wasting the money and so increasing the cost that it's got to today.

I'm inclined to think that it has been the fault of a lot of the doctors and the dentists as I've just mentioned because the doctors would give the people a medical certificate from work simply by going and asking. I know for a fact in some cases where that should never have happened. To have kept the Health Service going and viable they should have stuck to the rules that we fixed which they didn't do.

I think now there is some truth in what they say, it's priced itself out, because the public together with the people that were implementing it were not playing the game fairly and that's caused this disruption in it now.

Ruth Granville

July 8th I think it was, or July 5th, I'm not sure which date in July everybody had to register with a doctor, and they had a big buff form which they had to fill in in duplicate. Now most people couldn't fill in a form, so the doctor was sitting there scribbling away and I remember helping Dr. Eileen Wise. It was the thoughtful ones who registered first. I mean the feckless didn't, and the ones who couldn't write were put off by the look of the card. There was a tremendous lot of paper work.

I remember the first patient coming in and looking all bewildered. I think she probably came to test the water. I gave her a consultation and when she came out, she said, "Well where do I pay?" Of course all the money had gone. They were fairly heady days.

Dr. Gorman

My job was in the laundry at East Dulwich Hospital. I used to do the doctors' work, the administrative staffs' work. You see they used to have to send their box down, Monday morning, with their underclothes in and their white coats in, and they used to have to pay for a certain amount. I used to do it, pack it up ready to go up on Friday morning. Then I used to have another lot down Friday, the M.O.'s work, you know. I used to do their work.

Then, time went on and they started talking about the changing over, from the L.C.C. to the National Health Service. Well the 5th July was the date fixed, and of course one of the staff had to go to represent the Department. Well, no-one wanted to go. I didn't want to go, so they put the names in a bag, and shook them up. My name came out, so I had to go. I went off duty at quarter to three, had to be there before five o'clock at the Grosvenor Road, side entrance. There was a canvas canopy over the steps and a red carpet — I go up and I give my name Mrs. Childs, from the Linen Department, East Dulwich Hospital, representative. Another gentleman stepped forward. He said, "This way," took me to the cloakroom, took me clothes and then said "Follow me" and went into a room where they was giving the toast, to the changing over of the National Health from Lloyd George's Insurance.

Well of course there was a merry time going on, and then another gentleman came and asked me if I'd like to go and see the County Hall from the waterfront, so of course I went. It was rather interesting because it's a very huge place, and he told us about all the different rooms. Then we went and had a little bit more jollification, they was all well merry! But I left at 10 o'clock, because I had to be on duty next morning, and I was there, that was the second day under the National Health. There was plenty of enjoyment and everything.

Florence Childs



It went by without a murmur. There were lots and lots of meetings beforehand, and then it just happened. You know, everything was changing so much after the war that one more change was nothing. And there were so many people entitled to free medical attention anyway, the insured, under the National Insurance Act, so it was just an extension really.

But we did realise it at the time, I remember it very well, that you could have a doctor. You were put on his register, so if you were ill you got medicine and he came and saw you, or you went to see him. There was no question of saying "I can't afford the doctor."

It was nice to be able to go to the Chemist with your prescription and you got the thing for nothing. It was nice particularly for people who had two or three children.

Oh yes it was a marvellous thing, that you could have a doctor at any time. And you didn't have to think, "Oh I have to pay."

I'm sure that things are better, — I know the furniture is better in the hospitals. The experience I've had of one or two of them, the furniture is much better, and the nursing care as far as I could see, from my experience was as good as you could possibly expect. My brother-in-law and my sister have both had open heart operations. My brother had it on the National Health and she paid for hers; both came through, so that's all right.

There has been a gradual improvement in the standard of living. I started work in 1922, and things got worse and worse. I worked for my father. It was awful. No-one had any money, you had the hunger marches, you had the General Strike in '26 and it was bad you know. But however bad things were, there was a slow rise in the standard of living. Slow, imperceptible, but it was there, and that is a historical fact, not imagination.

Now, look, I'd like you to come with me, because I'm a garrulous old man and I talk to anyone on the buses you know. I have not met a pensioner who's got reasonable common sense who doesn't agree with me, that we're better off than we ever were. I've got a free bus pass, and in this borough I get a fortnights very heavily subsidised holiday, medical treatment is always there, and facilities are there, we've got lunch places, and everything like that.

I don't know of an old age pensioner who could say he was poor. Poor was when I first went to Bloomfield School when I was five, and there were boys in my class in the summertime — didn't have shoes and socks. You never get that now. It's gone. A good job, don't want it now. No there is a steady increase. I say, the good old days mate, you've had them, I had them and I don't want those days again.

Mr. Gorman

In 1948, nationalisation of the Health service came in, but it took a long time to get established. It didn't happen over night. Like with everything else, people resisted change. I was working down at the Evelina Hospital when the NHS came in, and what ever happened we didn't want change. We were very happy. The hospital had a nice little bit of history: it was built by the Rothschild Brothers. One of them had a wife called Evelina who died in childbirth and they had their own board of governors and there'd always been a Rothschild on the board of governors. It was built for the poor sick children in Southwark.

Well, number one we were going to have too much red tape, too much clerical work, too many forms, then there was this business of statistics that nearly drove us round the bend, but that's what the department seemed to thrive on.

When he introduced the Health Service, Beveridge hadn't got a crystal ball to tell him there was going to be all this terrific inflation. That thirty pounds for funeral expenses would now hardly buy a nail in your coffin. And now what are we paying? Look at all these people who've got to pay two pounds a time for medicine; that's ever so expensive. But that wasn't envisaged as part of the health service; medicine was going to be free. But we wondered how long it was going to keep up at the time.

There's not the caring attitude you see; it's got very impersonal. The thing that I like that has grown out of it is these hospices that they've got for patients with terminal cancer and this is the type of caring hospital that I should like to see developed.

Vivian Prince



Hammersmith Hospital Laundry 1936

Well I can't grumble a lot about the National Health because of what I've really had off of it because if I had to pay I would have had to pay quite a bit. I went into St. Thomas's to have my eyes operated on, and I'd a surgeon and specialists who helped, and I would have still — I had thyroid trouble. Not only that I was under Lewisham Hospital for thyroid treatment for five years and I couldn't wish for better.

I was a National Health patient in St. Thomas's, in the new block, but in the same ward there were ladies come from abroad and they were paying a hundred and two hundred pounds a week to stay. I was getting the same treatment and the same food and everything as those that were paying, which I was very grateful for.

Joan Tyrrell

The National Health can be a very good thing, if it has its priorities right, and good management, at the moment it's very bad management because people have got too greedy, and there are too many fingers dipping in the pie, and that's why the people can't get the fairness out of it. All the good drugs that should do poorer people good are taken off the market, and given to people that's got plenty of money, where the poorer person has got to make do with the cheaper drug. This is one thing that should be put a stop to. And if people can afford to pay for their own private medicines and what-have-you, then let them do so. But don't make poorer class people suffer for it.

Violet Beecroft

Although I see the National Health Service going down, I prefer to stay with it. Even if I had enough money, I wouldn't go and see a private doctor. What do I want to see a private doctor for? What's he going to do? He's going to sit me down and say this and that, but I'll get the same medicine in the end. I don't want anything false. It might sound mean, but I'm not mean. If I win the pools tomorrow I don't think I'll go to a private doctor. I just want to be with the people, and I want things to be fair.

Mrs. Brown

Now I don't think that any doctor should have to choose whether a child or a grown up or anybody lives or dies, or whether they should choose whether they go on a kidney machine, or whether they don't. I think the money should be provided for all these people that need this treatment. I have a daughter who has got very bad diabetes. Sometimes she has to wait three or four weeks before she can go into hospital to be seen when she gets a very bad turn, which I don't think is right at all. She should be seen to right away. And the hospitals have got in such a state now that they've got to choose who they take and who they don't, which I don't think is fair at all.

Eileen Farrow

Thank you National Health, for one reason — I've got a hearing aid, I've got false teeth, I've got glasses, you've allowed me to have an operation on my ear, I have help with my hearing, and my glasses are free. Thank you.

One moan I did have: I was told by my doctor I had to use a certain ear drop, as often as possible, possibly six times a day, and I used to have four bottles of this ear drop a week. I'm a pensioner now, but then I was a widow. When prescription charges went up, and I had to pay, I could not afford the drops. When I went back to the doctor he turned around and said, "Your ears are not very much better are they?" And I said, "This is all I can afford, two bottles a week. Whereas four bottles, which I needed, would have made my ears much better, and given other people a chance to see the doctor instead of me seeing him twice a week.

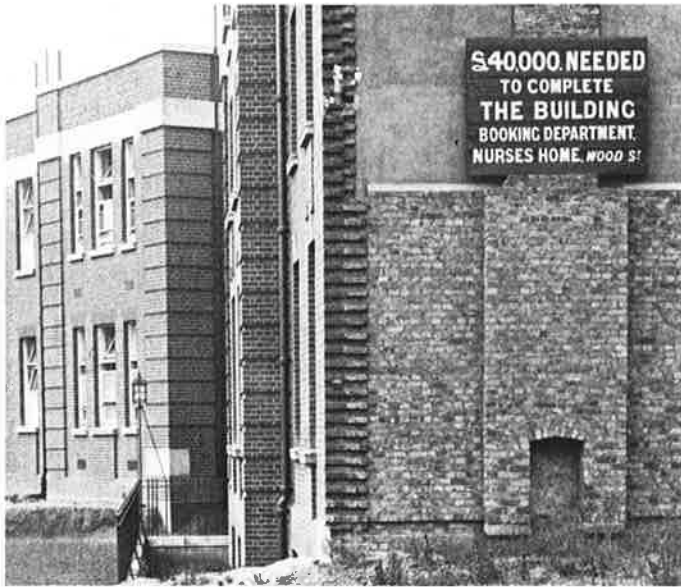
Nan Janes

I think the National Health Service is a very good thing for everyone and when it first started it was marvellous. But as the time has gone on it has been abused, and there's been such a lot of waste. But it is good because families, when they're ill and they have got to go to the doctors, they don't have to worry about money, they just get the treatment.

Dorothy Gygax

*1922 Queen Mary opens British Hospital for Mothers and Babies  
The three founders are behind her.*





*Still collecting for extension late 1920's*

My mother and father did a lot of work for the British Hospital for Mothers and Babies. They used to run the sales of work, whist drives and all that sort of thing.

It was a voluntary hospital which was started in a very old house in Woolwich. Then when the foundation stone was laid, there was a photograph taken of everybody outside the main building with the stone there. Then of course Queen Mary opened it. My sister, being the eldest was chosen with others to present a purse, I don't know if they do that nowadays, a purse with so much money donated, and the Queen was sitting up, in the end of a corridor, she had to walk up and present and bow to her and then back away, you didn't have to turn. Somebody else dropped out who had to present a purse, and I was able to do it as well, little leather things, pull string at the top I think, and how much was in them I've no idea.

The staff they were all so well trained. I suppose the Maternity Wards of other hospitals were as good, I don't really know. But this was renowned — more or less all over the world people knew about it.

We used to attend the different functions as much as we could and help to raise money for the hospital. In the first year of the war we had an abundance of apples, both my neighbour Mrs. Irving and myself, we just didn't know what to do with them. I happened to mention it to the hospital. They said, "Well we could sue them." And the



*Wartime deliveries*

nurses came up in their nice white aprons and were climbing up the trees, picking these apples. They took sackfuls of apples back which they welcomed in the war like that, and they made use of them.

It was very friendly down there, very friendly.

The babies were put out in their prams, they did have nice grounds.

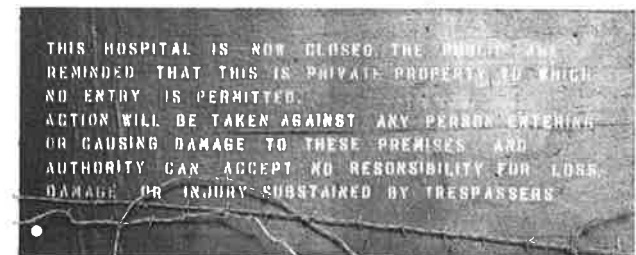
Sister Gregory, she was a dear old soul, Sister Gregory, grey hair and I can see her coming down the corridor, and she was looking and stopping and speaking to everybody, and reassuring them. She was medium height, slightly plumpish. A really dear old lady. And there was Miss Parnell, Sister Fry — she delivered my Jaclyn.

It was totally staffed by women — I know Dr Wise, a lady doctor, she was down there for years and years. I mean what they're going to do now they've closed the hospital down, I just don't know. I don't know where the people are going now.

Mrs. Jenkins



## BRITISH HOSPITAL FOR MOTHERS AND BABIES



*Closed and vandalised 1985*

I've had three children, they're all born in the British Home for Mothers and Babies. And I liked the British Home, and they shut it down, the people are going to Greenwich now which is like a cattle market, for pregnancies, and for maternity cases, and they've taken them up to Queen Mary's where my daughter's just had twins, they've done everything they could for her but they said they are over crowded, and the British Home should never have been shut, and Maggie Thatcher's shut that, shut the Cottage Hospital just down the road that was handy for old age pensioners, and for anything — if anything went wrong in the home, you could rush them straight down to there instead of going all the way to the Brook.

The Cottage Hospital in Eltham, they've shut that down, they're shutting St. Nicks down, they're trying to shut the Brook down and myself, I think it's all this Maggie Thatcher's fault, and if I had a gun I'd shoot her, and you can keep that on there as well.

Joyce Atlee 75



It is my view that the most important aspect of health in the next 10 or 15 years is going to be the care of elderly people. Regretably very little is being done, but they are now talking about a resurgence of the community services for the elderly people.

When we started in 1900, when the borough councils were first set up, the infantile mortality rate was 130 per thousand. It's now about 12. Now that meant at 130 per thousand we were losing pretty nearly 300 or more children every year because the population of the borough round about the turn of the century was in its hundreds of thousands, 110,000-112,000, something like that. This is the Metropolitan Borough of Greenwich. In 1965 it was probably just under 90,000 you see but the birth rate by modern standards was tremendous in a way you see. Now all those people who survived infancy and the First and Second World Wars are now the people who will be wanting to be looked after as elderly people.

And that again will never recur because the birth rate has never been the same since, and with elderly people the most important aspect of their life is their health, and that means they don't want social workers they want people with a nursing and a medical background really you see.

One of the first things of importance that we did was that we established a geriatric service which was second to none in the country. We recruited a Public Health Inspector, a woman Public Health Officer who had a great interest in looking after the elderly. Now she was a qualified Public Health Inspector, she was a qualified health visitor and midwife, so she had the background that really was essential for all sorts of aspects of domiciliary work.

In '51 and '52 we had a wonderful incontinent laundry service started for elderly people who couldn't get their soiled linen cleaned. We were delivering and collecting in some instances every day, in other cases every other day and in some cases twice a week and this was in the early 50's, before it was ever thought of from a national point of view.

We decided to set up lunch clubs, to get all these meals prepared and delivered and we extended that not only to the clubs but to home-bound people. Now this was before any legislation came about. We were in the field in 1951 doing that sort of business that something like 21 years later came into the Social Services Act. We were the first in the field doing this sort of business on a council basis. Unfortunately I regret to say that once it was taken over in the long run by the social services it was no longer the quality service — I'm sorry to say this but it deteriorated and so did the geriatric service. By the time '65 came when London government was reorganised we then had a core of something like 10 or 11 geriatric visitors each of whom had a thousand elderly people on their case load as opposed to what the social workers did. Our geriatric visitors had something like a thousand on their case load. Let's be honest, they didn't all require enormous amounts of time, but they would be visited once or twice a year and those people who required it were being visited more often. One of the things that was very useful about this from a preventive point of view from their first visit to an elderly patient of course in effect they would assess medically the individual, which the social worker can't do.

We found very many people were in the geriatric wards who ought really not to be there, and lots of people in the Part III accommodation who ought to be in hospital. So with Dr. Mestor who was the geriatrician — he was a Pole who'd skipped out of Poland just at the beginning of the war and he had the right idea. In two or three years we managed to get this stabilised. We got the people into Part III who ought to be in Part III and we got the people in Part III who ought to be in hospital into hospital. And of course the wards were very badly over-crowded, but his attitude was that it was far better to have our elderly people in our corridors if necessary rather than in a third floor back room where nobody's looking after them.

Well, we got this organised and the idea was fundamentally preventive. We would get these elderly people in and within five or six weeks get them up on their feet and out in their own homes which is where they wanted to be.

And this was so well organised that we were getting enquiries from all over the place: Devon, Cornwall, Yorkshire. "How are you handling it? You're doing it very well. Can we have an idea of what you're doing?" Really this was a pat on the back in a way. We were really in the forefront and lots of people right through the country on the nursing side wanted to come to Greenwich to get into this geriatric service. I can remember 25 doctors from Italy coming over and being sent by the Ministry down to see how we worked. About 3 or 4 doctors came from New York to see how we handled it. A couple of people from Portugal came to see us. We obviously had a reputation and in a way I suppose this was the crowning glory of the time I was in the service because this was something to be held up.

In the long run I became wedded more than ever to preventive medicine. I worked closely with the Medical Officer of Health; we were very close in the way that we looked at the health services of the borough. Our attitude was that it was better to prevent problems arising than finding them carrying on and finishing up in the hospital where the curative services are going to do their best in a most expensive way to try and redress the balance. So he and I worked together.

In 1948 when the National Health Service came in we thought, this is utopia; it couldn't be any better. The hospitals, the preventive services, the GPs all getting together, all part and parcel of one organisation. We ought to have a wonderful service. It never worked out. Hospitals still carried on as they normally did, the GPs were no more co-operative to us, all talked in terms of confidentiality. The preventive services depend upon statistical material about occurrences of deaths and diseases and things like that. We wanted figures so that we could say this is the situation in our area and it requires this, that or the other strategy. Unless it was a notifiable infectious disease which GPs were bound by law to divulge, they would not give any information of this nature, even though we didn't want to know names; we only wanted figures and the sexes and the ages. So whatever's happening today you can't compare it with yesterday because nobody keeps these types of figures and statistics.



I've been in and out of hospitals and sanitoriums all my life and I know how essential all these hospitals are. I can remember the first hospital ever so close to us was the Metropolitan and that went. Then my Julia was in the German hospital in the 70s. The operation she had was really a major operation yet you cannot see the scar. She had strangulation of the stomach, so she lost her ovaries. But she was in a new part of the hospital and the doctors were so dedicated. The surgeon was a woman and she was so careful when she had scars on people that you'd have to look twice before you could see them. They're just like a hair line, and it was wonderful really that you had a doctor there who cared for women in that way. And that department of the hospital went.

I was treasurer then for Islington Labour Party and we had a campaign against the cuts when the Tories got in. They started making cut-backs so a few of us got together and formed a group. The Royal Northern Hospital was the first they wanted to cut, and so we tried to agitate and get people involved. We used to give out leaflets and have nights of vigils there. All the local people wanted to keep the accident unit there because it was so near and the people could run there. The next hospital to it was the Whittington, and although in distance I should think it was about half a mile, when the road was congested with heavy traffic, especially the juggernauts travelling through, it could mean if a person had a heart attack they could die getting to the Whittington.

And we used to have marches with the nurses and the Sisters starting at the Archway, picking up the nurses outside the Royal Northern. People were very generous; we had lots of donations sent to us but of course they did close it which was a loss to the community at large. I think it's a terrible thing this government can't see no further than its nose and trying to get people to join BUPA — how can people afford to go private? It's about time they really came down and visited the back streets of some of these poor boroughs and see how people do live. They'll just keep on chopping, and chopping and chopping till there's nothing left . . .

Rosie Dale

I think much more money should be spent on preventive medicine. What we have really got is not a health service but a sickness service, and at the moment somewhat inadequate means of dealing with sickness. But a health service should be dealing with prevention and I don't think we've got that.

You can't prevent things like acute illnesses but you can prevent a lot of illnesses if you had sufficient research. I might not be in this bed because of osteo-arthritis, I might be out of it. And you could prevent a lot of elderly people from deteriorating by educating them and their GP's. Because by and large the elderly aren't suffering from dementia but from sheer unpreparedness for what happens as you age, and they don't know how to cope with it and mostly their minds are not occupied, that's very important. People don't eat properly; they have enough to eat, but they eat the wrong things.

I think money is wasted on operations like heart transplants. I think this is a waste of money. It's hard maybe to say so, but if you consider every heart transplant, I think you can do about twenty by-passes, and it's the by-passes you should be doing. How many have died because they've been on the waiting list for by-pass surgery while this one man has had his four years extra life after a heart transplant? Probably dozens. And how many hip replacements have not been done? The priorities are wrong. I don't think we should be doing that kind of thing, not for instance when they're cutting down on things like kidney transplants because they haven't enough money. To do a heart transplant may be a person will live for a couple of years, but give a kidney patient a kidney and you give them back a normal life. Now they're having to close kidney wards and people have died because there weren't enough dialysis machines. That's ridiculous because kidneys are readily available.

Mrs Jo Page





# Woman, 86, sent home unable to feed herself or even stand

**AN 86-YEAR-OLD woman was discharged from hospital to live alone in her 11th floor flat although she was unable to stand or feed herself.**

vitamins pensioners are given when they're in hospital to boost them up, there must be a considerable amount of malnutrition. They think we're daft, they don't think we can work anything out like that.

We can never get full statistics of how many deaths are caused by hypothermia; it's all called bronchial pneumonia. They don't even say it is brought on by hypothermia, but we would like to know how many deaths there are in the winter particularly this last winter.

I blame the B.M.A. because they won't give out the information. I suppose they regard the action groups like us with suspicion. They don't want to give us something more to fight on so we could go to the Government and say, "Well here's the list of the people who've died through hypothermia because our heating allowance is not enough. People can't keep themselves warm and here's the result of it." You could present the evidence then, but you can't get it at present. I must say we've got a very good M.P. He does raise the question on and off because we remind him.

We've got three hospitals now in this borough that are on the short list. That's St. James's, Bolingbroke and the Atkinson Morley. Now the Atkinson Morley is the finest brain hospital that you could have anywhere and yet it's on the short list. It's going to leave us that enormous St. Georges Hospital which is what they say is their answer to everything, but you ask the people who are working in St. Georges if that is going to be the answer and they'll tell you the truth: no it isn't. When we lost Clapham South Women's Hospital, long before that was closed, I asked just how many women specialists they'd got in St. Georges, so that if you did want a woman doctor to treat you, you could have one, and out of the whole of St. Georges there were two women doctors. How can two women doctors make up for the loss of South London Hospital which is the women's hospital. The public are being conned the whole time which is an absolute disgrace.

Everyone in this area fought hard for the South London Hospital and we had the pensioners doing picket duty there as well. We did picket duty outside St. Benedicts, but once they've made their decision, that's it.

Well we are dreadfully afraid of losing a lot of the services that we've got now, and when you consider that we haven't got anything that we haven't fought for in the past this is the tragedy of it. People of my age group have fought to get what we've got now, and now, at this time of life when we're beginning to need the health services more because of our age, they have been eroded, which is dreadful. I cannot understand people's intelligence today as to how they're letting these things happen, even the working class from the last war till now should still have enough in their minds to remind them of what it used to be like.

When I was a child mother used to have to pay half a crown and then he'd take his time whether he'd come and visit you or not, he didn't always come, but they were better at coming out those days. Out of a small wage it was still quite a bit to pay, particularly if the family had got two or three children and had a number of illnesses, it was a hard struggle.

I worry particularly about hospital treatment because there's such long waiting lists. If you require a hip replacement today there's an awful long wait for it, or any type of treatment actually you have to take your turn. The Home Help service which is part of the follow up from hospital, you don't get the home help service that you should do. Even the district nursing now is getting curtailed which again is a very essential service because we find a lot of pensioners getting discharged from hospital before they should be who require a district nurse to go in and attend to them. You can't blame the district nurses if they don't turn up on time or at all, if their work load is so great they just can't do it, so it's those sort of services that are beginning to hit very much at senior citizens. It's going to cost more money in the end, so it's very short sighted.

I just can't see what is going to be the end of all these cuts that they're making now as regards hospital beds because where are they going to put the people? We're an ageing population so therefore that means there's more people going to need medical attention. The older you get the more your chances are that you're going to need it and if they take all the beds away where are we going to go? The bulge will come in another ten or twenty years.

I maintain an annual check up because I've always felt prevention is better than cure and if you were able to have a thorough overhaul once a year and see that everything is still in its right place and working properly I think that would be a wonderful advancement in health. If you get assured that the aches and pains are nothing serious, it's far better than just worrying what's wrong with you and I feel that everyone should have that annual check up. We've asked our own GP's about this and their excuse is they're so busy now that they wouldn't have time to take on extra work to which we say, well we've got our health centres, they do it for the children at school so if they can do it for the school children they should be able to do it for the retired people. It should be made possible at various health centres in the London boroughs that they should have annual checkups.

When pensioners are admitted to hospital just how much malnutrition do they find? We can't get a full answer because they say they haven't made any particular note of it, which I don't believe. They must be able to form an opinion whether you are suffering from malnutrition, an obvious malnutrition. And judging by the amount of

The Age Exchange is a theatre and publishing company working with London pensioners on shows and books which record their life experience and their current concerns.

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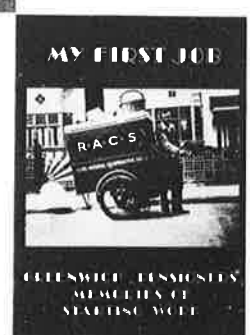
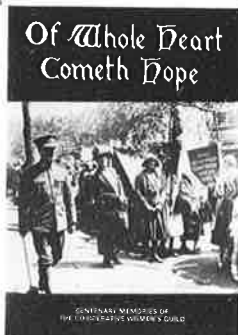
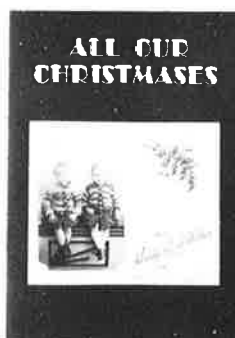
'My First Job': Pensioners' memories of starting work in the 1920's and 30's. Price £2.

There are special prices for OAPs who wish to order any or all of these books.

In all cases postage and packing is an extra 50p. per book.

If you would like to order any of the above titles please write, enclosing cheque plus 50p. for postage and packing, to Age Exchange, 15 Camden Row, Blackheath, London SE3. If readers are interested in hiring our touring exhibition of photographs, they should contact us at the above address.

There is a videotape showing the process by which the stories in this book have been translated into a musical show with the help and advice of the pensioners. Television History Workshop have made a documentary programme for Channel 4 Television about Age Exchange's work on "Can We Afford The Doctor?". Enquiries regarding hire or purchase of the video should be addressed to Television History Workshop, Mary Ward Centre, 42 Queen Square, London, W.1.



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