

THE HISTORY OF HAM GREEN HOSPITAL

Ham Green Hospital is situated on the South Bank of the River Avon, on the top of a hill that overlooks the old harbour and village of Pill. It is situated in acres of green fields with beautiful woodlands to the East of the hospital at Leigh Woods. The hospital has been in existence for over seventy years. The centre and oldest part of the hospital (now the Administration Block) is a fine example of a large country house. The house was built over a long period of time, it is a house of no mean proportions and it is not surprising that it was once described as "one of the principle seats of Somerset". Close examination of the house reveals the fact that it was built over a period of two separate centuries, the 18th and the 19th, thus the house reveals very different types of architecture.

At the turn of the century the glorious days of nobility at Ham Green House and the sound of the elegant parties that could once be heard coming from the house came to an end. It was some time between 1900 and 1910 that the house became an isolation hospital. Bristol Corporation bought the hospital because of outbreaks of smallpox (hitherto facilities for providing isolation hospitalisation had been provided by a hospital ship in the Port of Bristol called the *Margareda*). Thus in 1894 for a price of £8,695 for the site of Ham Green and the Old House, the Corporation became the owners of a new hospital. The acquisition of the site included two farms and some cottages, it was approximately 4½ miles from the City Centre.

In the first instance the hospital had seventy-six beds, the official opening was in July 1899 by the Lord Mayor of Bristol, Councillor Ashman. Immediately after opening the following two years saw typhoid cases housed in "pavilion principle" type wards. In 1934, on 11th July, there was an extension to the hospital by the opening of the Sanatorium Buildings and also the opening of the first stage of the Nurses' Home. By 1934, therefore, the hospital had two quite separate services, one for infections, diseases, and fevers, and the Sanatorium for the care of tuberculous patients, each block of buildings were separated by the hospital road. It is interesting to note that in 1950 there were as many as 500 beds available for T.B. treatment. In and by 1966 only seventy-six cases of pulmonary tuberculosis were notified in the city, for which there were twenty beds available at Ham Green. Today the Infectious Diseases Unit is used on a Regional basis, although thankfully the cases of T.B. has now almost totally disappeared.

The extension of Ham Green as a major hospital in Avon, continued in 1937 with the addition of a fourteen bedded block for emergency smallpox cases. Further nursing accommodation was added in that year and also a Disinfection Unit and Smallpox Mortuary. By this time the hospital had most of the buildings in the main section that we see today.

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Through the war years blank walls were erected in front of all blocks as protection against air raids. Indeed, several incendiary bombs were dropped on the hospital. Fortunately, no damage was ever sustained by the hospital or the staff.

After the war in 1948 came the creation of the National Health Service, and so the hospital that had already served the community for fifty years entered perhaps the most important phase of its history. The hospital came under a Management Committee transferring in 1959 to the Southmead Group. The change away from infectious diseases and care for tuberculosis patients began at this time as Southmead began to develop the hospital into a mainly acute hospital. The services such as general medicine, gynaecology, urology, geriatrics and nephrology were developed from 1959 onwards.

In 1974 a special unit, the first purpose built unit of its kind in the country, was opened for the treatment of the young chronic sick which had previously been nursed on geriatric wards. In 1975 the Rehabilitation Unit was opened comprising of occupational therapy and physiotherapy for the assessment and re-training of patients prior to discharge to home or wherever.

The twin theatres were opened in 1977, 'O' Ward was then upgraded and re-named Western Ward to accommodate patients from the Western Area.

In 1978 the Regional Health Authority selected Ham Green Hospital as its venue for the Regional Infectious and Exotic Diseases Unit. This unit covers the South West Regional Health Authority Area, from Gloucestershire to Cornwall, the Wessex Regional Health Authority, from Swindon to Bournemouth, and the South Wales Regional Health Authority, from Cardiff to Herefordshire.

In 1980 the efforts of the League of Friends, staff and many groups were rewarded by the completion of the swimming pool.

Looking back over a proud history we have seen Ham Green develop and flourish over eighty plus years. The association with the local community has also developed over a similar period. The population of Pill is about 4,000 people, many of these people have close and deep associations with the hospital, indeed many of the staff live in the village and surrounding area. Their view of the hospital and the threatened closure is to totally support the hospital, and already their fight to save it has begun with well over 40,000 people having signed a petition to help in the fight. - Please join us!