Beckenham Hospital History Murals

“A new LIFT building, the Beckenham Beacon is a health ‘one stop shop’. Local residents were pleased to have the new facilities but sad that the name “Beckenham Hospital” would be dropped, as their local hospital had been significant, particularly when the area was bombed heavily during the Second World War.

With help from Adrian Green, the curator at our local museum, and Dr Adrian Thomas, a radiologist on our hospital staff who keeps an archive of local historical material, I set up a group with the idea that we might commission a series of panels to document the history of Beckenham Hospital from its 19th century cottage hospital days to the present. I had Woodgate Design and their hospital history murals in mind, having worked with them before.

Current and retired staff contributed, as did members of the public and ArtsEnhance’s volunteers. The panels were funded through donations to Bromley Hospitals’ charitable funds (Beckenham Fund) and we also received donations from the local NADFAS and from Thackray Williams, a local firm of solicitors.

The panels were installed in November 2007 and have already proved to be one of the most successful projects ArtsEnhance has done. They are located in a circulation corridor between the main entrance to the building and Outpatients and give pleasure to the many people who use the corridor each day as well as providing a splash of colour and interest in a clinical building.”

Josie Aston
Arts Co-ordinator
ArtsEnhance
The First Fifty Years 1870 - 1920

A Cottage Hospital

Beckenham in 1851 was a small village in the Kentish countryside. It had a population of only 1,688 people with 307 inhabited houses.
This changed with the arrival of the railway, which meant faster journey times into London. Beckenham Junction station opened in 1857 and with it came more people and housing.
Population expansion led to a growth in local services. A committee was set up to build a hospital in 1871 and the following year a four-bed cottage hospital was opened in Croydon Road.
The professional staff of the hospital consisted of a matron and two honorary medical officers. Patients were charged 6d per day and the building also housed public baths and a washhouse.

‘The committee earnestly desire that all interested in the hospital would exert their best endeavours to influence suitable patients to avail themselves of it, where obviously they procure treatment and nursing with consequent successful results, which cannot always be obtained in their own homes, and feel justified in making this statement from the testimony and experience of patients who have entered the hospital somewhat unwillingly, but have left with expressed feelings of gratitude and contentment.’
Hospital Annual Report, 1892

Image Captions
Peter Hoare paid for a hospital to be built on his own land in Middle Barnett Field.

Articles of partnership between Dr Stilwell and surgeon Edward Carpenter of Kennington. Dated 31st March 1881.
Population growth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<tr>
<td>1801</td>
<td>955 people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1831</td>
<td>2,124 people</td>
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<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>20,045 people</td>
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<td>1901</td>
<td>26,331 people</td>
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By 1901 Beckenham was no longer a small village; it had a population of over 26,000 people.

Early Expansion

There was a major crisis in 1877 when the hospital landowner, Peter Hoare, died. His heir put up the annual rent to £80. This made funds tight, but the hospital continued to raise money and was able to buy the freehold for £1,500.

The original hospital building was not large enough to meet the demands placed on it by the local population. The first extension was the Lea Wilson Ward added in 1887, which increased the number of beds to 13.

Another extension was built after a major fundraising campaign launched in 1897 to commemorate Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee.

from delivering babies to laying out the dead

Mary Elliott 1826 – 1907 was the Beckenham district nurse in Victorian times. She was responsible for everything health-related in the district.

‘Forty years ago when Beckenham was a village with a population of between two and three thousand, Mary was known to everyone in the parish... If a navvy had to be nursed, or any sick person cared for, it was Mary who was summoned... She has ever been the friend of the sick and needy, lending a willing ear to every cry for help, nursing women in their hour of need, and often at her own cost, ministering to their wants... The unfailing friend of the poor, she has been honoured by all who have known her.’

Canon Woolley writing about Mary Elliott, 1898

The Cottage Hospital Movement

‘A hospital near enough to his home for ease of visiting, and in familiar surroundings, where the room is not overcrowded, but open to air and sunshine, with well cooked food, suitable medicines, peace and quiet and regular care, where the chance of safe and speedy recovery is enhanced.’

Taken from ‘The Handy Book of Cottage Hospitals’ by Horace Swete, 1870

In the early 1880s the hospital only had eight beds. Sometimes the hospital staff had to give up their beds when there were too many patients.

On 18th May 1899 HRH Princess Beatrice of Battenberg visited to open a major extension to the building – increasing the number of beds to 32. Beckenham High Street was decorated to welcome the visit of HRH Princess Beatrice of Battenberg.

In 1911 the number of casualties treated was 285. This figure increased by over 300% in 1912 to 1,026 casualties!
Alexander Muirhead set up a factory in Elmers End in 1895.

Muirhead’s continued to be based at Elmer’s End until the 1980s. He was a leading expert in telegraphy and the production of X-ray machines. He installed the first X-ray machine in the hospital in 1902. Muirhead’s company also developed the pre-cursor to the fax machine and he was the founder member of the Institute of Telegraph Engineers.

Alexander Muirhead installed the first X-ray machine in the hospital only seven years after X-rays had been discovered by Wilhelm Conrad Röntgen.

Image Captions
A patient treated at the geriatric day hospital in Beckenham Hospital. The radiograph, taken in 1913, shows the advanced techniques used to repair a fracture.

The First World War

On the outbreak of war the hospital was linked with the Naval Brigade Depot at Crystal Palace and with Balgowan School.

During the First World War military hospitals were set up in Balgowan and Christ Church Schools. Christ Church later moved to a new building in Lennard Road. These hospitals were run by Voluntary Aid Detachments (or VADs) under the British Red Cross and included trained volunteers as well as local doctors.

Balgowan School in Beckenham was used as a military hospital for casualties from France and Belgium during the First World War.

In 1906, my uncle, Herbert Guy Thorp of Beckenham, planned a trip to Brighton on his motorbike to meet with friends at a pub. He was riding on the main road when he was hit by a car driven out of a side road by a man who had never driven before (no driving licence was needed then). He was badly injured; his leg was smashed up and his motorbike was mangled. He was taken to Beckenham Hospital for treatment. The pioneering treatment received was to implant a metal plate with screws. The accident may very well have saved my uncle’s life as he was unable to fight in the Great War, in which his brother died. However, he drove ambulances instead.

Patricia Weal, local resident

Motor Accidents
The Cottage Hospital in its annual report for 1912 commented on the dramatic rise in the number of casualties as a result of motor accidents. In 1912, 1026 patients were treated as opposed to 285 in the previous year.

Image Captions
The recreation ground opened in 1891. It gave – ‘a pleasurable & cheerful prospect from the wards’

Dr George Stilwell, son of Dr R Stilwell, served Beckenham Hospital as honorary medical officer from 1900 to 1938.

Stretcher Duty at Balgowan Hospital/School

The recreation ground was often used for important community celebrations, such as Empire Day.
The People’s Hospital 1920 - 1948

The Best for Beckenham

Two new wards were added to the hospital in the 1920s, but the building was still not adequate for the size of the local population. In 1936 a large appeal was launched for one million shillings with the slogan ‘The Best for Beckenham’, to pay for a state-of-the-art extension.

The Percy Jones Ward opened in 1924 as a women’s ward with 16 beds. A similar sized ward for men was opened at the same time.

Dr George Denison Stilwell Son of George R Stilwell – he succeeded his father in 1938 as the honorary medical officer. He became a member of the group management committee in 1948 when the NHS was formed.

This text is taken from a plaque which is both a memorial to those who died in the First World War and a commemoration of the construction of the Percy Jones and George Stilwell wards.


Image Captions

Percy Jones and George Stilwell Wards front of the male and female wards, opened in 1924 as Beckenham’s memorial to those who died in the Great War.

£517 was raised from the hospital cricket match in 1921 to help pay for a new extension.
The Ruth Sutton ward for children was opened in 1932

In 1929 the hospital’s House Committee discussed the sad case of a 10 year old boy with septicaemia. The boy had been nursed with adults for nearly 2 years. It was felt he would benefit from going to a seaside convalescent home. However, the home wanted the hospital to guarantee funeral expenses should he die. Also, a fee of 4 guineas was to be paid in advance, which his mother was unable to meet. Two members of the committee kindly offered to pay the fee, but the question of funeral expenses was referred to the Board.

The Trapnell Wing

The new extension included the Trapnell Wing, which was opened by The Duchess of Gloucester in July 1939. The new wing included a nurses’ home, rooms for private patients and a boiler house supplying steam for sterilising and cooking.

The Trapnell Wing cost £38,000 to build. Construction started in 1938 and was completed in just over a year.

The new wing was named after Dr F C Trapnell, honorary medical officer from 1914 to 1949.

The Trapnell Wing provided accommodation and teaching facilities for the hospital’s nurses.

‘The hospital had met the needs of the past 30 years, but with the rapid growth of population the responsibility of providing adequate and up-to-date service had fallen on them with urgency.’

Lord Stamp, President of the hospital, at the opening of the Trapnell Wing 1939

Image Captions

The Trapnell Wing was opened by HRH Duchess of Gloucester in 1939. Here she can be seen with the hospital’s first President Sir Josiah Stamp (and the Beckenham Bunnies).

Fund Raising

The local community maintained the hospital through public donations. Beds were sponsored by local people, companies and schools.

Hospital fetes were organised in the Croydon Road Recreation Ground to help raise funds for the hospital. Local schools also collected fresh eggs for use at the hospital.

The Linen Guild was set up in 1924 to provide and mend linen and blankets for people staying in the hospital – as patients had to provide their own. The Beckenham Bunnies were junior members of the Guild. Membership of the ‘Bunnies’ was 2s, 6d for ‘life’ in 1932.

‘I was a Beckenham Bunny many years ago... I was very young and do not remember a lot about it except that we dressed up and performed a dance routine for the ladies of Beckenham at what, presumably, were fund raising events. And then we had tea!’ Pamela Osborn

Image Captions

The Beckenham Bunnies were junior members of the Linen Guild, founded in 1931. They collected toys, silver paper, books and money donations.

Both the Linen Guild and the Beckenham Bunnies took part in this ‘Jubilee’ procession in 1935.
Paying for healthcare

Government Money
While there was no comprehensive scheme of health cover, taxpayers contributed to healthcare in a number of ways. For instance Beckenham Hospital received money to cover the costs of treating air raid casualties during the Second World War and the Board of Education paid for operations to remove tonsils and adenoids from children in the 1940s.

Drivers
Motor accident victims could claim hospital expenses from their insurance company. For instance, in 1937 a patient at Beckenham had been in hospital for 200 days, which cost £100 but he was not prepared to settle with his insurance company until he knew his liability to the hospital would be limited to £50, so in this instance, the hospital made a loss.

Insurance Scheme
The hospital organised an insurance scheme called the ABC (All Beckenham Contributory Scheme). There were different charges according to whether a patient was an "A", "B" or "C" member. Income was taken into account. This scheme had to pay if a member was treated in another hospital.

Legacies
For example, a property worth £700 was given to the hospital in October 1940.

Annual subscriptions
Local companies such as Twinlocks at Elmers End paid an annual subscription for their employees to be treated at the hospital.

Friendly Societies
Working men insured themselves against accidents and ill-health through Friendly Societies. In 1946 The Ancient Order of Foresters proposed a payment of 6s per day to the hospital when members were treated as in patients.

Donations
From grateful patients.

Hospital Sunday
Church collections were given to the Metropolitan Sunday Fund and to individual hospitals.

Charitable Funds
King Edward VII Fund gave annual grants to voluntary hospitals, including Beckenham. This Fund developed into today's well-known King's Fund.

Appeals
Volunteers went around houses with collection boxes and hospital departments also had their own boxes.

Social Events
There were fundraising social events such as dances and amateur dramatics.

Gifts
An example of a gift was a dressings steriliser from the USA Red Cross given in 1942.
My Memories of Beckenham Cottage Hospital, 1946-7

‘In August 1946, aged 8 years, I was admitted to the children’s ward at Beckenham Cottage Hospital where I spent six very happy months. I was seriously ill with pleurisy and pneumonia, and was subsequently treated for tuberculosis. The nurses were very caring and kind and I don’t remember being homesick, despite the fact that visiting was only on Wednesday and weekend afternoons, and special permission was needed for my 11 year old sister Margaret to see me. My mother walked through Beckenham Recreation Ground daily to wave to me, but as my late father worked a six-day week, he was only able to visit on Sundays. When I was moved from the main ward to the glass solarium I had a very good all round view of the outside world.’
Former patient Janet Lambert

Image Captions
Janet Lambert (right). This picture shows the unveiling of a new cot and bed which were named by the Beckenham Division Girl Guides.

Kesley Park Farm
The farm adjoining the hospital was purchased for staff quarters in 1946.

The Second World War

Many hospital staff would have served abroad during the Second World War. In the Beckenham area the elderly Dr Trapnell was kept busy performing emergency surgery. Nurses also had to work long hours, averaging over 50 hours per week in the hospital.

During the war food shortages meant the hospital gardens were used to grow food for the staff and patients. The hospital gardeners were assisted by members of the Women’s Land Army. In 1942 almost 4 tons of produce came from the gardens. Chickens were also kept in the nurses’ garden, but there were difficulties getting feed for them. Dr O’Brien proposed keeping rabbits for meat but the Board said no.

In 1940 Beckenham was upgraded to a Casualty Clearing Hospital with 125 beds to treat the victims from bombing raids, but the facilities for treating patients were inadequate. The number of patients more than doubled so the children’s ward had to be used as a casualty reception ward and the children moved to the Staff Dining Room. The Maids’ Dining Room had to be used as an emergency operating theatre. Dr Robertson’s wife died of injuries received in an air raid in 1940.

Fuel costs went up, and in an effort to save money on heating water, lines were painted five inches from the bottom of all baths; water was not to exceed that level.

The hospital staff had to work for 13 hours to treat the injured without a break or refreshments. There were times during the war when nurses slept on the hospital floor.

War damage to the windows in the wards and corridors made the internal temperature drop much below normal; doctors were concerned about surgical cases being transported in the cold.

Penge and Beckenham were heavily bombed during the Blitz and when the ‘doodlebugs’ arrived later in the war. Beckenham was badly bombed on the night of 16th April 1941. Josiah Stamp, who served on the hospital management board, was killed at his home in Shortlands. Over 40 casualties were admitted to the hospital that evening.

Children from across the area were evacuated when the doodlebugs arrived in 1944.
The National Health Service 1948 - 1972

The Welfare State

The National Health Service established 5 July 1948
Funding for the hospital was heavily affected by the war. The local population was lower than in peacetime and people preferred to contribute money to the war effort. There were exceptions; in 1945 local National Fire Service personnel decorated the children's ward and raised the money to name a bed.

Money shortages continued immediately after the war; fund raising campaigns had limited success when it was realised that the government was to fund all hospitals under the NHS.

Common illnesses when the NHS was founded
In 1951, Dr John Fry had recently entered general practice in Beckenham and he analysed why his patients came to see him. The most common problems were with breathing, digestion and the heart, 'neuroses' and skin disorders. Before the NHS, people would not have gone to the doctor unless they were seriously ill. Dr Fry estimated that 75% of his patient list came to visit him now they didn’t have to pay.

Under the National Health Service, control of the hospital was taken out of the hands of local people. It was transferred to an area management committee that also governed Bromley and Farnborough Hospital. Organisations such as the Linen Guild were no longer needed, but were replaced by the Welfare Committee and the Friends of the Hospital. They continued to fundraise for items not available through the NHS.

Image Captions
Visitors’ book signed by Churchill’s wife Clementine and by former Bromley MP and Prime Minister Harold Macmillan.

On the roof of Beckenham Hospital in the 1950s. Harry Lyne was a local councillor who served on the management board of the hospital and was the appeals chairman.
Outpatients Waiting Hall
Patients had to wait in a crowded room to see the doctor before improvements were made in the late 1950s.

Casualty Treatment Room
This was the only casualty treatment room in the outpatients department. Due to limited space several patients had to be treated at the same time.

**Further Expansion**

Funding under the NHS was very tight. It was difficult for the government to estimate the day-to-day costs of the new service. At the same time the public’s expectations of what a health service could provide rose.

Despite the limitations on spending the hospital still managed to respond to the changing needs of the community. A new outpatients wing opened in the late 1950s. Overcrowding and long waiting lists also led to the opening of the Douglas Lindsay Ward in 1969 as a new male surgical ward, with the Ruth Sutton Ward redecorated to become a female medical ward. Percy Jones was the female surgical ward and George Stilwell became the male medical ward.

Medical science was rapidly gathering pace and new developments outpaced savings. For example at Beckenham the use of penicillin, a new drug in the 1940s, rapidly increased from 1,110,000 units in 1945 to 7,075,000 units in 1946.

The cubicle curtaining in the Percy Jones Ward was provided with funds from the Friends of the Hospital and made by the hospital sewing room.

**Image Captions**

George Stilwell Ward
Ward sister and students treating a patient. Note the extra beds in the middle of the ward!

Taken in the late 1960s or early 1970s, this possibly shows Mr D I Higton (centre) who became a consultant surgeon.

Patients could pay to have a private room in the Trapnell Wing

New Outpatients Block completed in 1959. It was opened by Councillor Katheleen Moore, Mayor of Beckenham.

Visitors’ Suite
In 1957 a legacy was used by the management committee to adapt and furnish a small room that could be used by the families of patients who were dangerously ill. This photo also shows Miss B Hourston, who retired as matron in 1959.

Christmas Themes
Each year a different theme was chosen for a ward
Barnacle Bill, George Stilwell Ward 1966
In 1966 it was ‘All At Sea’ and each of the patients was a different nautical character. One of the Doctors (called Dr Gollock) had bright red hair so the theme in 1969 was ‘Gollocklocks and the Three Bears’. Balloon bears were put over all the beds.
The Douglas Lindsay Ward

The Douglas Lindsay Ward was opened in 1969 at a cost of £50,000. Built on top of the Ruth Sutton Ward, it was intended to last for ten years, until surgery moved to Bromley. Instead it lasted for nearly forty years. It was named after the consultant gynaecologist at the hospital from 1919 to 1959.

“...it was a lovely ward to work on. All sorts of general surgery and genito-urology procedures were carried out. At that time patients who were in for major operations stayed for 2-3 weeks, although they were usually got out of bed on the first day...”

Eileen Howard remembers working as a sister on Douglas Lindsay Ward

Nurse Training School

The hospital became a Nurse Training School in 1941. Later, it was affiliated with Guy’s Hospital and St John’s Hospital, Lewisham. Wartime conditions meant that nurses were no longer required to give up their job or training place on marriage. In 1948 a complete Nurse Training School was established and was linked with Sydenham Children’s Hospital. The training school was re-grouped in 1963 with Bromley and Farnborough Hospitals.

At the end of three years training to be a nurse a hospital certificate and silver badge were awarded. Eileen Howard won the gold medal for outstanding work.

Nurses’ Accommodation
Most young nurses were expected to live in the nurses’ accommodation. A communal sitting room was provided with television and radio.

Margaret Humble (née Bartholomew) qualified in 1960. She was presented with her hospital certificate and surgical prize by Sir Phillip Goodhart, MP for Beckenham. Margaret started as a staff nurse in 1960, and was promoted to night sister four years later. In 1968 she became the sister in casualty, which later became the minor injuries unit.

“I was a cadet nurse at 16. We weren’t allowed on the wards at Beckenham, because we weren’t old enough, but worked on the wards at Sydenham Children’s Hospital. We learned how to do bed baths, one of the patients showed me, a little boy who had his legs up in a sling – you have to do this, this, that and the other!”

Margaret Humble (née Bartholomew) remembers her training to be a nurse

Image Captions
Presentation of Certificates and Prizes 3rd July, 1965, at 2.30pm

George Stilwell Ward Sister with students

The nursing school was originally on the first floor of the Trapnell Wing

Mr Cookson’s Retirement
Mr C C Cookson (left) was the consultant surgeon at the hospital from 1949 to 1971.

Testing the pudding mix
Hospital cook, Mrs Connie Maslin (centre), and nurses in the hospital kitchen try the Christmas pudding mix in 1961.
Metcalfe’s Walking Sledge

Aiding the mobility of the severely disabled Norman Metcalfe, physiotherapist and inventor 1921-2003 Norman Metcalfe worked at Beckenham Hospital until 1965. In 1952, while employed at Bromley General Hospital, he was sent a patient who had suffered from polio and TB. This lady had not been able to walk for four years. To help her, Metcalfe invented the ‘Walking Sledge’. This was one of the first appliances of its type designed specially for use in the home, meaning patients could remain mobile without outside assistance. Using Metcalfe’s Walking Sledge the patient was then able to walk again.

Fire drill Harry Lyne Ward, 1971

This was intended as an exercise for the fire brigade, in order to be able to evacuate people from beds, but everyone was out before they arrived. All the ‘patients’ were members of staff. The ‘patients’ were evacuated to the hospital car park as part of the drill.

The Hospital Gardens

The hospital gardener Ken Cooper won many awards for his work at the hospital.

*Image Captions*
Pictures of the hospital garden flowering in the late 1960s and early 1970s.
Survival and Rebirth 1972 - 2007

‘Save It’ Campaign

“Our basic aim is to make everyone in the hospital cost conscious. If Doctors and Nurses treat NHS resources as though they were their own money instead of something coming from a bottomless pit, I believe millions could be saved.”
Mr Ian Higton, Consultant Surgeon, Daily Telegraph, 6 December 1979

The ‘Save It Campaign’ was introduced because it was hoped that saving money would save services. Consultant Surgeon Mr Ian Higton started the scheme.

Minor Injuries Unit (MIU)
In 1973 the Accident and Emergency Services were closed when a new centre opened at Bromley Hospital. A Minor Injuries Unit was kept on site staffed by local GPs. By 1977 Beckenham had become an acute general hospital, and had 116 beds with outpatient services.

In 1979 there were rumours of threats to Beckenham Hospital’s services. Mr Higton, the consultant surgeon initiated the ‘Save It’ campaign with a view to showing that sufficient money could be saved by good housekeeping in hospitals to avoid closures.

The campaign was picked up by the national media and was featured in the Daily Mail and Daily Telegraph. Mr Higton went on the Jimmy Young show and Health Minister Dr Gerard Vaughan visited the hospital. Mrs Thatcher even talked about the scheme at the Conservative Party Conference.

Image Captions
The ‘Save It Campaign’ was introduced because it was hoped that saving money would save services. Consultant Surgeon Mr Ian Higton started the scheme.

Health Minister, Dr Gerard Vaughan (left) visited Beckenham Hospital in 1979 to find out about the ‘Save It’ Campaign.
Happy Retirement Margaret

Margaret ‘Barty’ Humble retired in 2000. She worked at the hospital for over 50 years from nursing cadet at 16 to voluntary worker after her retirement. Her leaving party took place in the former nurses’ sitting room at the top of the hospital. Mr Williams, the consultant, presented Margaret with her leaving gifts, one of which was a volunteer’s badge. She was also given a precious album of staff photos.

“Minor fractures were plastered, injuries from the park were a regular occurrence – people fell out of trees, children broke their arms, legs and collar bones and cut their feet on glass from broken bottles in the paddling pool. There were head injuries, quite often children were brought in having taken accidental overdoses of things they shouldn’t have swallowed.”

Margaret Humble (née Bartholomew), known as Barty, remembers working as a Sister in the Minor Injuries Unit.

Happy Christmas to yooooou!

At Christmas time the nurses sang carols to the patients. They wore their cloaks turned inside out to show the red lining and had lanterns. The Salvation Army visited, as did the choir from the local church, Christchurch.

Fund Raising

Annual hospital fete organised by the friends to raise much-needed funds

Fundraising for the hospital continued throughout the 1980s and 90s. An annual hospital Fete was organised by the Friends to raise much-needed funds. The money went towards everything from medical equipment and room refurbishments to TVs, books, chairs and curtains.

Bed Push

The bed push was organised to promote the Friends of Beckenham Hospital Fete in 1982. Night sister Mary Ahearn volunteered to be the patient. The bed was pushed up the High Street to Safeways.

Charity Cycle Ride

In 1983 a fund raising cycle ride to Brighton was held for the Hospital Friends.

Nurses’ Bottle Stall

From 1956 onwards, the Friends of Beckenham Hospital organised an annual fete in the Croydon Road Recreation Ground. The bottle stall was organised by nurses at the Friends of Beckenham Hospital Fete.

Image Captions

Trained / PAT dogs were allowed into the hospital to comfort patients.

Threatened Closure

A petition was placed in GPs’ surgeries to help save the hospital – patients and residents groups came into the hospital to sign it. Over 22,000 signatures were obtained in six weeks and it was presented to Parliament by local MP Sir Philip Goodhart.
In the early 1980s there was a threat that surgery was to be withdrawn. Staff formed the Beckenham Hospital Action Committee to protect services and raise public awareness. In 1982 a petition containing 22,000 signatures from local people was gathered in support of the hospital. Beckenham MP Sir Philip Goodhart submitted the petition to Parliament.

The hospital continued to be under threat after the petition was submitted, but through heavy campaigning by the Action Committee, and the support of the local community the hospital survived. However surgery stopped at the hospital in 1986 and wards were closed the following year. In cost saving measures across the health authority only services for the elderly, outpatients and a minor injuries unit were retained.

Hospital Cuts are a Calamity
“The decision by the Bromley Health authority to move the acute beds out of Beckenham Hospital and to close the operating theatre is a calamity. Once again, the Bromley Health Authority administrators seem to have ignored the fact that more than half the residents in Anerley, Clockhouse and Penge do not have cars, and that the journey by public transport to Farnborough Hospital and Orpington Hospital can be a nightmare.”
Mr Ian Higton, Consultant Surgeon, Daily Telegraph, 6 December 1979

Petition to save Beckenham Hospital
“I have great pleasure in presenting a petition that asks that this House should instruct the Secretary of State for Social Services to ensure that a full range of medical services is maintained at Beckenham hospital. The petition has been signed by a wide cross section of community leaders and is supported by more than 22,000 signatures gathered in just six weeks. The petition represents the largest demonstration of support for a local institution that I can remember in the past 25 years. This unprecedented gesture in part reflects the fear that the authorities will soon take far reaching decisions without being aware of the strength of local sentiment and, in part, gratitude for the splendid skill and dedication of the staff of Beckenham hospital...”
Sir Philip Goodhart, Hansard, 17 December 1982

Operations at the hospital were stopped as part of a cost cutting exercise across the health authority.

The Grey Lady
Beckenham Hospital’s Ghost
Do you believe in ghosts? A tall, silent figure dressed in a long, grey cloak, walks out of the old matron’s office, goes along the corridor, turns right and seems to climb a flight of stairs – then disappears.

This apparition was seen on several occasions by the medical and surgical secretaries whose offices on the first floor led onto this corridor. But there were no stairs. She appeared to have climbed through a blank wall, into Harry Lyne Ward, the oldest ward in the hospital.

One day in the 1980s, the hospital maintenance men were working in Harry Lyne Ward. They took up the floorboards in one corner – and found a flight of stairs. These stairs were beautiful, solid wood and polished. Nobody in the hospital knew of their existence. They were in the right place for the Grey Lady’s walk up to Harry Lyne Ward.

Who is she? We don’t know, but possibly she may be an early matron. If our Grey Lady is still around, we hope she will settle happily into her new environment.
Eileen Howard, former nursing sister

Beckenham Hospital 2005 before rebirth now the Beckenham Beacon
Beckenham Hospital has survived to be reborn as the Beckenham Beacon. There has been much change affecting other local hospitals.
1 Bromley’s Lennard Hospital (geriatric hospital in Lennard Road, Bromley) closed in 1983-4 as part of a cost cutting scheme. Some services were moved to Beckenham.

2 The Beckenham Maternity Hospital (Stone Park Avenue) closed in 1986.

3 The Cheyne Hospital (Woodland Way, West Wickham) closed in 1989.

4 Sydenham Children’s Hospital (Sydenham Road, Sydenham) was closed in 1991 and the services moved to Lewisham Hospital.

5 Bromley Hospital closed in 2003 and services moved to the new Princess Royal University Hospital.

6 Farnborough Hospital was demolished and rebuilt to become the Princess Royal University Hospital in 2003.

7 Orpington Hospital continues to provide a range of services.

*Image Captions*

Ward and Departmental Sisters, 1974

An extension was added to the hospital to house geriatric patients. Eighteen months later the patients were moved out and part of the wing was left unused.

Douglas Lindsay Ward
Ward round with Sister Eileen Howard (left), house surgeon and ward staff.