

Historical beginnings

As we enter into a period of growth and redevelopment it's important to understand our historical beginnings. Each issue of Project EXCEL will take you on a journey through the past 59 years.

Operating Theatres - 1971 to 1989. This article was published in 'Middlemore Memories' and was written by retired theatre sister Margaret Price.

I became the theatre sister in 1971 and retired from the department in 1989. The period 1971 to 1987 was a busy time. For example 2000 procedures were carried out in 1948 compared with 11,000 in 1989. During this period the ratio of acute to elective patients also increased, with the overall workload becoming much more acute. The number of cases over a weekend rose steadily, and the average would be 50 acute operations per weekend.

The department accommodated the following specialities: General orthopaedic, plastic with attached dental services, ENT (Ear, nose and throat), some eye surgery, gynaecological and obstetric.

Caesarean sections often caused a crisis when the department was working full-tilt. The first theatre that finished an operation was cleared for the Caesarean section, regardless of the speciality interrupted.

The theatre suite consisted of six theatres with anaesthetic and scrub rooms, in a race track design. Three theatres were on each side flanked by sterile areas. The wash rooms and the recovery room were placed in a central area. There was an attached plaster room.

An adjacent central sterile supply department kept the theatres supplied with sterile packs, and eventually took over the washing, repacking and sterilisation of the theatre instrument sets. This was a great change, freeing theatre staff from this task. All our nurses rotated through this service.

A full time receptionist became a necessity as the workload increased. Beryl Angus will be remembered with great affection for her knowledge, efficiency, experience, advice and wheeler-dealing.

The orderlies provided a necessary, efficient and helpful service to assist the department running smoothly everyday. The wards maids Yvonne and Mary Tini were our regular tea ladies and cleaners for many years. How many thousands of cups of tea did they provide!

The staffing levels had to change with the demanding workloads and the provision of seven-days-a-week services. Acute loads at night meant more nurses were on the shifts, particular on Friday and Saturday nights.

By 1987 there were 70 whole-time nursing equivalents in the department made up of full and part-time charge nurses, staff nurses, enrolled nurses and hospital aides.

In such a large, hard-working department with many people there at any one time, conflicts were surprisingly minimal.



Margaret Price in the theatre supervisor's office signing the time-sheets. Behind her in the cupboards are the protocols and to the right are the catalogues of the instruments and prostheses.

Historical beginnings - continued

As a supervisor I had massive support from the 12 charge nurses and all the other staff. It was not all work and no play. Most years we have had a Christmas party when everybody let their hair down.

The working atmosphere was very good, and it was a pleasure to hear former registrars returning as consultants saying *"It's nice to be back at Middlemore"*. I think that also applied to the whole Hospital.

There were certain memorable personalities around the hospital and certain amusing incidents will also be remembered. For example I remember being called on a very busy morning by a prison superintendent. He wanted to speak to the plastic surgeon. Thirty-five of the female inmates had tattooed each other with ink. All I could think of was *"They will wash off with time."*

One of my worst moments in theatre was one afternoon when two student nurses were crossing the railway line opposite the Kings College entrance. After one train had passed they leapt across the line only to be struck by a train passing in the opposite direction and which they had not seen. I was rung to clear two theatres to deal with their horrendous injuries. My next task was to dismiss the 12 student nurses attached to the department.

Since I retired in 1989 there have been a number of necessary changes in the department, in response to burgeoning loads and new techniques. There are now ten theatres with associated ancillary areas and a much larger recovery room.



A happy team, fully trained and ready for action. From left they are Charlotte Wairiki, anaesthetic technician, Dallas Jessiman, charge-nurse and tutor, Joan Winterburn, staff-nurse, Maureen Pringle, enrolled nurse, Nina Wellacott, enrolled nurse, April Robinson, charge-nurse and Catherine Logan, charge-nurse and tutor.