72 YEARS OF THE NHS:

NELSON HOSPITAL

THANK YOU
The brainchild of surgeon, Frank Deas, this hospital opened at 73 Merton Road in 1900, to meet the medical needs of the growing population. Privately funded, it had ground and first floor wards with two beds, plus cots, a matron’s office, stables, a mortuary and nurses accommodation on the top floor. Public demand soon made a larger facility necessary - this led to construction of the Nelson Hospital.
Nelson Hospital, Kingston Road, Merton Park – pictured shortly after it opened in 1912

Opened by Princess Louise, Duchess of Argyll, the new hospital consisted of a central one storey building with two storey buildings on each side. Fundraising for the facility had started in 1905, the centenary of Lord Nelson’s death and each of the new wards was named after the Admiral’s famous ships, battles and naval commanders including Trafalgar, Copenhagen Victory, Vanguard, Hardy and Collingwood. (Nelson was a Merton resident between 1801 and his death in 1805.)
Women’s ward, Nelson Hospital, Kingston Road, Merton.

The new hospital was described as comfortable, homely and caring. During the First World War it became an auxiliary service treating injured servicemen transferred from the Royal Herbert Hospital and the Horton County of London War Hospital in Epsom. By 1918 the Ministry of Pensions had funded an X Ray Department, plus massage and electrotherapy equipment to treat to ex-servicemen requiring ongoing care. An orthopaedic department was also added.
Main entrance to the 1922 wing, added as a lasting memorial to Merton residents killed during the Great War.

It is a credit to the hard work of the medical team that 2070 patients and 1048 out patients were treated during the four year conflict.

The memorial wing, opened by Admiral of the Fleet, Sir Frederick Charles Doverton Sturdee, had a ground floor children’s ward, a first floor women’s ward with nurses accommodation above, plus residences for medical officers, an X Ray department and Pathology lab.
Surgeon and hospital founder, Dr. Frank Deas, pictured in the laboratory, interwar era
New mothers pictured in the maternity wing at the Nelson Hospital, Merton.

In 1924 a dozen cottages on an adjacent site were purchased to accommodate a new maternity unit. The foundation stone was laid by the Princess Royal in 1930 and the new wing was opened by Mrs. Stanley Baldwin, wife of the former Prime Minister, in 1931. It held 21 beds, an antenatal clinic, two labour wards, a nursery and isolation ward. A further extension turned the Nelson into an 86 bed facility.
Surgery in progress – Operating theatre, Nelson Hospital, 1944.

During World War II, the hospital not only cared for patients from Merton and the surrounding area, it was also called upon to treat air raid casualties. During 1943 and ‘44 outpatients and casualty departments were opened. An adjacent property was also bequeathed for use as a physiotherapy unit and nurses accommodation.
Inspecting a young patient’s X-Ray, Nelson Hospital, c.1944

The Nelson became part of the newly formed NHS in 1948 and was part of the South West Metropolitan Regional Hospital Board. Now a 116 bed facility, it also had new clinics for gynaecology and ear, nose and throat disorders. Further extensions followed during the 1950s and 1960 to cater for more female patients, children and maternity cases.
Anatomy lesson – Nelson Hospital, 1940s.
In addition to its caring role, the hospital was also an important training institution known as the Wimbledon and Nelson Hospital School of Nursing.
Nelson Hospital, pictured during the 1990s.

During the early 1980s, the maternity wing was converted into a 60 bed surgical unit with a new operating theatre. The central section of the hospital, with its large ground floor wards, became a 48 bed geriatric and day hospital for the elderly.
Architect’s plan for the Nelson community health facility incorporating the three pavilion facades of the original Nelson Hospital.

During the 1990s, there were several unsuccessful attempts to redevelop the Nelson to form a community hospital. Eventually Fulcrum LIFTCo was authorised by South West London Health Partnerships to award a contract to build a new £10 million community health facility. The developer, Rydon, have created a facility housing flexible and extended GP and outpatient services. These include retinal screening, podiatry, x-ray/ultrasound, endoscopy and phlebotomy services. Opened in April 2015, the three-storey building, holds GP clinics, a café, pharmacy and associated office accommodation.