

Queen Mary's Hospital, 1915-1971

The history of Queen Mary's Hospital, originally known as Queen's Hospital, dates from 1915.

It had become apparent that there was a great need for the organised care and treatment of facial and jaw injuries arising from the First World War. Considerable work was being done in France and by Major (later Sir) Harold Gillies at Aldershot but, with the number of casualties arriving from the military front, the existing accommodation was hopelessly inadequate.

In 1915 Sir Charles Kendarine, a founder of Queen Mary's Hospital (Roehampton) suggested the building of a hospital in the grounds of Froggnal House in Sidcup. The government purchased the land and a large number of contributions were received from British Red Cross Societies, both in the United Kingdom and abroad, the order of St. John of Jerusalem and many other distinguished organisations and individuals. It is interesting to note that a recreation hall, cinema and canteen were built with money subscribed following an appeal in the "Evening Standard". The cause was greatly helped by the personal interest and advice of Queen Mary, who commanded that, on completion, the hospital should be named the Queen's Hospital. Building commenced in February 1917 and the hospital was completed in five months, the first patient being admitted on the 16 July 1917. Later that year, it was decided that the Queen's Hospital should be the central military hospital for facial and jaw injuries, not only for the United Kingdom, but for all the Imperial Expeditionary Forces. The buildings were enlarged to accommodate 560 beds and six smaller hospitals, containing 450 beds, became affiliated to it.

It was during the period 1917-1920 that the hospital acquired considerable historical importance, particularly in the field of plastic surgery, under the direction of Sir Harold Gillies and it may justly be called the birthplace of plastic surgery in Britain. Many of the techniques discovered and developed at that time have become standard practice and its reputation was such that applications from Canada, Australia and New Zealand were received that resulted in soldiers and doctors from all three countries setting up separate units at the Queen's Hospital. Two teams of American surgeons and dentists

spent many months training in surgical and dental work there - training not available anywhere else at that time.

Royal support continued and visits to the hospital were made by Queen Mary in November 1917, Queen Alexandra in April 1918 and by The Duke of Connaught in June 1918.

As an indication of the workload at this time, 11,752 major operations were carried out in the years 1917-1921 and of the 18,135 military patients treated during the period 1917-1929, over 8,000 of these were suffering from severe facial injuries. In 1920, the number of facial injury cases admitted began to drop considerably and general medical cases were admitted. In this year the hospital ceased to be controlled by the War Office and responsibility for the buildings passed to the Ministry of Pensions.

On 31 May, 1929 the hospital was closed but it was purchased by the London County Council in 1930 and re-opened by Princess Mary in July of that year to accommodate male convalescent patients. At this time too, Queen Mary gave consent for the name of the hospital to be changed to Queen Mary's Hospital.

During the Second World War, the hospital continued its work but expanded its activities to admit most categories of medical and surgical cases. It was subject to damage by bombs in 1941, when three wards and Frogal House were hit, with a loss of life of seventeen patients and four staff.

The hospital was taken over by the Ministry of Health on 5 July, 1948 and became the main hospital for the Sidcup and Chislehurst district. Under the Sidcup and Swanley Hospital Management Committee the hutted hospital at this time contained approximately 300 beds, with associated operating theatres, a casualty department, an x-ray department, a pathological laboratory, nursing school and other services to enable it to undertake the work of a general hospital.

There had been demands for replacement of the buildings of Queen Mary's Hospital for many years and in 1959 the Ministry of Health agreed that a new hospital should be built. Work began in 1962 and in June 1965 residential accommodation for 150 staff, largely medical and nursing, together with a new School of Nursing, was opened. A

major rebuilding phase which brought the number of beds to just over 600 began in 1969.

The 56 bed Maternity Unit, which was built in 1966, closed in 2010 to permit the redevelopment of the site as a care home. As of 2018, Queen Mary's Hospital is an acute general hospital administered by the Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust and serves the population of the London Borough of Bexley.