

Sidcup Cottage Hospital, 1882-1977

As the Sidcup Hospital was built in 1882 at 1, Clarence Villas, Birkbeck Road, it was the second of the cottage hospitals to be found in the present borough's boundaries.

It had only eight beds and was an inconvenient building but its usefulness to the poor inspired efforts to acquire a more commodious building.

The second construction was opened in 1890. This time there were twelve beds. The premises were still in Birkbeck Road but on a corner with Granville Road. They were considered spacious when compared with the former hospital's cramped situation. At the opening, speakers emphasised the provision of adequate sanitation, while Mr R. Biddulph Martin, J.P., in the opening address, assured his listeners that the hospital would act as a school for it would teach the poorer patients the necessity of cleanliness. The hospital, costing £1,825.0s.6d in all, began existence free from debt but the audience was reminded that there would obviously be annual costs and therefore loyal donors were necessary. Two wards were named Callan and Purser after the past and present matrons. Miss Purser's services were publicly acknowledged by the gift of an album and a cheque for £22. The local paper made an interesting observation here: Dr Poole thanked the donors for the gift since "according to the usages of this country and of the present century" Miss Purser was not expected to reply personally.

The hospital proved popular as shown by a letter to the Bexley United Charities in March 1891. Sidcup had helped seventeen of Bexley's poor and could the hospital receive some monetary assistance? Bexley United Charities had to get permission from the Charity Commissioners. When this was granted the Trustees voted £10.10s to Sidcup.

By 1898 an operating room and mortuary had been added, £520 being realised by a Fancy Fair. Donations were always being requested; annual expenditure was £430 but only £150 was assured by the short list of subscribers.

As with most hospitals before nationalisation the money came in, albeit reluctantly, and Sidcup continued to retain a good reputation in the neighbourhood. Medical and nursing care was quietly undertaken and in 1937 a physiotherapy unit was added. Its best work was done during the thirties and forties and it did not close during the Second World War. Then came the National Health Service and patients gradually grew less in number. Queen Mary's Hospital no longer belonged to the L.C.C. and therefore the locally sick could now experience the benefits of a larger and better-equipped hospital.

Finally, Sidcup Cottage Hospital, realising that it was becoming uneconomic to administer, appealed to Queen Mary's for help. (Incidentally the same situation was to be found in the Cray Cottage Hospital). So, a unit was opened for the use of local G.P.'s (see reference in account of Queen Mary's). Consequently, in 1974 the main work of Sidcup was transferred to Queen Mary's with the physiotherapy unit following two months later. The hospital was demolished in 1977 and the Sidcup Health Centre was built on its site.