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 Kendardine, a founder of Queen Mary's Hospital (Roehampton) suggested the building of a hospital in the grounds of Frognal. 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, Sidcup. Building commenced in February, 1917, and the hospital was completed in five months, the first patient being admitted on the 16 of 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 separate applications from Canada, Australia and New Zealand were received that enabled soldiers and doctors from all three countries to set up separate units at the Queen's hospital, and two teams of American
surgeons and dentists spent many months training in surgical and
dental work there, a training which was not available anywhere else.

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 four years 1917-1921, and of the 18,135
military patients treated during the period 1917-1929, over 8000 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 was 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 Hospitals.

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 Frognal received hits, 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, it
was linked administratively with Cray Valley Hospital; Kettlewell
Hospital, Swanley. Both Swanley Hospitals were later closed, in 1955
and 1957 respectively. The huttled hospital at this time contained
approximately 300 beds, with associated operating theatres, casualty
department, x-ray department, pathological laboratory, nursing
school and other services to enable it to undertake the work of a
general hospital. In 1968 the Sidcup H.M.C. was amalgamated with
the Orpington and Sevenoaks H.M.C., and, together with the Cray
Valley Hospital and Sidcup Cottage Hospital, Queen Mary's became
associated with Orpington, Sevenoaks and Sundridge Hospitals under
the Cray Valley and Sevenoaks Hospital Management Committee.
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 new Maternity Unit of 56 beds with a special care baby unit of 14 cots received its first patients in December 1966, to bring the total number of beds at the hospital to 365. A major re-building phase, which would bring the number of beds to just over 600, commenced in September 1969 with the aim that Queen Mary's Hospital should be totally housed in modern accommodation with full supporting facilities and residential accommodation, to provide a comprehensive range of district hospital services.