



A brief history of the RSH

In 1837, following a public outcry over civilian losses in a town centre fire, Dr John Bullar opened a small casualty ward in rented premises at South Front and then in St Mary's Street, Southampton. He and his surgeon brother William gathered support and funds to acquire a site in Newtown for a permanent 40 bed hospital which was opened in 1844. Its accommodation was doubled by further wings being added in 1851 and 1857, when a chapel at the eastern end completed the hospital frontage to Fanshawe Street. This street which was named after the Reverend Charles Fanshawe who was one of the hospital founders with the Bullar brothers remained the hospital's Royal Mail postal address for the next 150 years. The Bullar brothers were the first of many distinguished town benefactors to have wards and Southampton streets named after them. Only the chapel remains today, but the original Fanshawe Street hospital building was not demolished until 2003.

In 1866, following a large fund raising campaign by the Masonic Lodges, further hospital buildings were started as part of the national campaign to endow the country with a network of Royal Voluntary hospitals eg Winchester's Royal Hants County, Brighton's Royal Sussex, the Royal Bournemouth etc. In 1868, the Royal South Hants hospital was inaugurated.

The momentum of building was maintained by individual benefactors, regular subscriptions, donations, special appeals and money raising activities. By 1933 the hospital had 275 beds. Patients were mostly admitted on the recommendation of subscribers and donors and paid for their treatment according to their means, agreed with the hospital Almoner. These arrangements continued until 1948 when the RSH became part the National Health Service (NHS)

The RSH was Southampton's leading hospital for over 100 years. This was largely due to it being a voluntary hospital, which had more status than incorporation infirmaries such as the Southampton General Hospital (SGH) which was originally started by the town's Guardians of the Poor, who exercised commendable farsightedness in acquiring a 35 acre site in the north west of the town in 1900 for a new hospital.

The RSH has witnessed many events, including two World Wars and changes to its neighbourhood and local populations. The specific targeting of the town during World War 2, necessitated the transfer of many of its services and operating theatres to places such as the Broadlands estate at Romsey.

In the 1960's the town's NHS services were expanding at a fast pace. The Southampton Group Hospital Management Committee (an early type of Health Authority) was accorded 'teaching' status in partnership with the University and its growing medical

school. This further propelled investment and the creation of regional and national specialties. Although much of this development went into the town's General Hospital site, where there was room to build and expand; a regional Radiotherapy Centre was opened at the RSH in 1964 and remained there for 40 years before transferring to the SGH.

In the mid 1970's national plans were being drawn up to close the large mental health asylums around the country. As part of the Knowle hospital closure near Fareham (originally the South Hampshire Asylum), a new Department of Psychiatry (DOP) was opened at the RSH in 1979 to take adult mental health patients from Southampton and around south west Hampshire.

In the early 1980's a huge Outpatient Centre was built at the RSH. By this time the city's leading hospital was the SGH and consultant medical staff were more likely to visit their RSH outpatient clinics from their base at the SGH.

In 1991 the sovereignty of the RSH as an independently managed hospital ended after nearly 150 years when it became part of the General Hospital Management Unit, later to become the Southampton University Hospitals NHS Trust. From this time very little new investment was made in the site and its future role became increasingly unclear.

In 2006, as part of the Health Plan for Greater Southampton, it was decided by the local Health Authority that the management and ownership of the RSH should transfer to the Southampton City Primary Care Trust (SCPCT) and a new lease of life is beginning to emerge for this city hospital as it begins to become a 21C NHS Integrated Care Centre offering a range of local and citywide NHS services.

Two wards for older people services were opened again in 2005. With a greater emphasis on NHS accessibility a new Primary Care Delivery Centre will open in early 2007. This will accommodate local PMS General Practitioners, Walk in Centre facilities and a range of community/clinic services. In 2007 the chapel will be 150 years old and plans for a new role are being discussed with staff and the local community.

After 55 years as a public monopoly the Labour Government health reforms at the beginning of the 21st century favour the introduction of private sector health care suppliers into the NHS. This is beginning to impact in a very significant way at the RSH where an Independent Sector Treatment Centre (ISTC) will open in 2007 inside the Outpatient Building to provide NHS elective care. An Independent Sector Diagnostic supplier will also be active in providing services such as MRI scans on the site from 2007. In 2009, the Department of Psychiatry will close after 30 years and services will move across the site to a new Adult Mental Health Unit which will be built by a private development company who will lease it back to the NHS for the next 30 years.

Change once more for a hospital which has served our town/city so well.

