

THE
LEAVESDEN
HOSPITAL
STORY

1870-1995





An architectural competition for the building of both asylums to similar designs was won by the architects Giles and Biven. Both Leavesden and Caterham Asylums were built on the pavilion principle

Asylum Road, Abbot's Langley, c. 1900

with a central block, housing administration, stores, kitchens, workshops and staff quarters, and two long corridors, one for male and one for female inmates, with wards leading off. The sexes were strictly segregated.

The foundation stone of Leavesden Asylum was laid on 31 October 1868 by Dr William Brewer, Chairman of the Metropolitan Asylums Board. Despite some problems with the contractors and a shortage of the distinctive Leavesden bricks "of plain substantial character", the Asylum was opened for the admission of "quiet and harmless imbeciles" on 9 October 1870.



Nineteenth-century weighing chair

Intended to detain and segregate its inmates from the outside world, Leavesden formed an isolated, self-contained community with its own chapel, cemetery, laundry, gas works, water supply, farm, bakehouse, shoemakers', tailors', upholsterers' and paint workshops. The patients carried out most of the work in the asylum and those incapable of any other job were expected to clean the wards and corridors.

Visitors were allowed twice a week, but were effectively deterred by the distance and expense of travelling from London.

Recreation was provided in the wards in the form of cards and

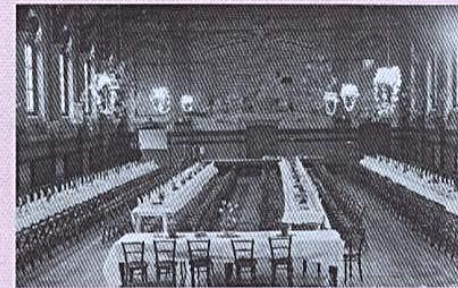
boardgames and occasional entertainments, with exercise in the courts attached to the wards. Unlike the general hospitals of the time where it was strictly forbidden, smoking was considered "absolutely necessary to the treatment of the insane".

By 1876, Leavesden held 2,118 patients in an asylum designed for 1,500. Additional ward blocks were built, but the overcrowding remained despite attempts to make the wards more cheerful with pictures, flowers and ornaments.

"an infirmary for stowing away all the wreckage of our social system"

Dr. Walmsley, Acting Medical Superintendent
1886

Although the function remained primarily custodial, there was an attempt at the classification of patients



The Recreation Hall, opened in 1892, decorated for an event in February 1937

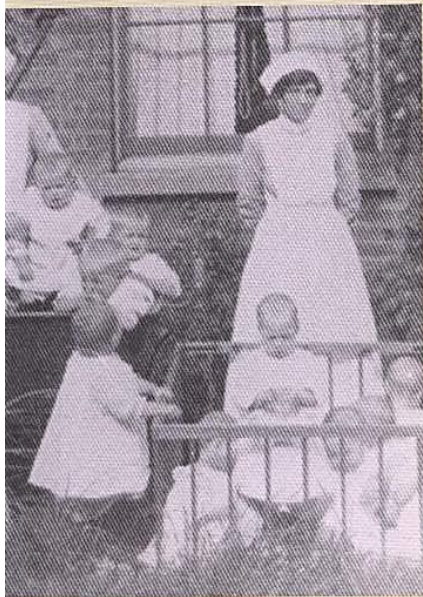
according to handicap and need. Special dormitories with higher staffing ratios were set aside for epileptics requiring closer supervision to avoid the need for mechanical restraint or seclusion to prevent these

patients injuring themselves during fits. After 1878, children were separated from the adult patients, with whom they had originally been indiscriminately admitted, to prevent them from copying the habits of their elders and were sent to a new Metropolitan Asylums Board school at Darenth, near Dartford. Infirmary blocks were built for the growing number of elderly and infirm patients at Leavesden. Eye wards were opened after 1915 when Leavesden was designated for the admission of all Metropolitan Asylums Board cases of trachoma.



Ward, c. 1900

Leavesden had a high incidence of tuberculosis compared with Caterham Asylum and Darenth Colony. This was blamed on poor conditions in the upholstery shop. Isolation wards were set aside for TB patients to receive open air treatment.



The role of the early attendants was mainly that of warders.

Their uniforms, like those of prison warders, displayed numbers and stripes indicating rank until 1898. Discipline was strict and the sexes were as strictly segregated as among the patients. The Matron and Medical Superintendent were even reprimanded for visiting each other's quarters, and the first chaplain was asked to resign after being caught playing billiards in a public house. Early staff were dismissed for the ill-treatment of patients, often in self defence, foul language and being drunk or asleep in charge of a ward. It was difficult to recruit and retain suitable staff because the younger attendants felt too isolated and longed for the bright lights of Watford and London. The County asylums offered better pay.

After 1898, the status and conditions of the attendants was raised and a conscious attempt made to foster a new nursing spirit in place of the old custodial function. Teaching in nursing duties was organised and in 1901 seven attendants at Leavesden were awarded the proficiency certificate of the Royal Medico-Psychological Association. In 1904, the women attendants began to be called nurses but it was not until 1919 that the title of male nurse was introduced. Houses were built for

married staff and billiards and recreation rooms supplied to keep men away from the public house.

As Leavesden was very much a closed

“a restricted and somewhat depressed life”

Dr. Shaw, Medical Superintendent, 1876

gives way to “the new nursing spirit”

Dr. Elkins, Medical Superintendent, 1898

community for staff as well as patients, the staff created their own entertainment and recreational facilities. Leavesden had its own successful football and cricket teams, an asylum band and organised amateur theatricals and dances. The patients were encouraged to support the staff sports teams and were entertained by staff concerts and shows.



Ward, c. 1900



Leavesden staff, 1920

“promote a healthy spirit among the patients”

Dr. R.M. Stewart, Medical Superintendent, 1923

After the Great War, when the call-up of many of the attendants had made staff shortages acute, the emphasis in the treatment of patients changed from detention and segregation to prevention and treatment. Training in personal hygiene became important for all patients. Parole cards were granted to male patients to wander within the Hospital grounds, and after 1929 a few of the ablest patients were allowed to work on licence outside the Hospital. Pay for patients working in the workshops had begun in 1923. In 1926, occupational therapy was introduced with carpentry, upholstery and crafts for the abler residents and raffia work, sewing and knitting for the less able.

In the 1930s, two companies of girl guides and a boy scout troop were formed from the more able patients. From 1937 to 1955, they were allowed to join local troops at annual camps, and were expected to work for their badges like any other children.



A Scout camp in 1937, photographed by Cyril Ruse, the organiser



Extracts from the rules of Leavesden Hospital, 1932

The male and female patients shall be kept in separate wards, and no male nurse or servant or patient shall be allowed to enter any female wards, nor any female enter the male...

During the day patients of both sexes shall be employed as much as practicable especially out of doors; the men in gardening, husbandry and handicrafts, the women in occupations suited to their ability; and as a principle in treatment, endeavours shall be used to occupy the minds and bodies of the patients to induce them to take extended exercise in the open air, and to promote cheerfulness and happiness...

Before teatime no work other than hospital work is to be done by working patients, but after tea such patients may, if they wish, do work for the nurses, provided such work is for the nurses' own use. No payment, either in money or kind is to be made for any work so done...

When the patients go to bed their clothes are to be folded up and placed on shelves provided or as otherwise directed...

Every patient is to be bathed once a week, unless exempted by medical order and not more than one patient is to be bathed in the same water...

The gate porter shall exercise a general observation to prevent the escape of patients and keep them from communicating improperly with persons outside...

The Medical superintendent shall have paramount authority in the Hospital...



Control of all Metropolitan Asylums Board hospitals was passed to the London County Council in 1929. The modernisation of Leavesden, which had begun under the Board, was continued and improvements made in clothing, food and staff facilities, although the wards remained crowded. Under the London County Council, Leavesden was described as "a happy hospital".

"a happy Hospital"

The staff continued to have an active social and recreational life centred around Leavesden. In 1939 the Leavesden Hospital Sports and Social Club was formed to foster a friendly



Staff day trip to Margate, 1937

relationship between all grades of staff and to co-ordinate all social activities. It was said that it was necessary to be a talented footballer, cricketer or musician to be employed at Leavesden.

During the inter-war Depression, there were about 200 job applications each week, mainly from the Depressed areas of the North-East, Scotland, Wales, Ireland and Norfolk, and preference was given to those with social and recreational talents. Despite the connections of a number of Leavesden families in working over many generations at the Hospital, recruitment from the Watford area was never large. Indeed in the years of full employment after the Second World War, overseas recruitment became increasingly important.

In 1932, the Annexe was opened for senile patients requiring little more than routine medical care. It occupied buildings on the other side of Asylum Road, now College Road, from the main hospital which had previously been used by Leavesden Residential School. Opened as St. Pancras Industrial School in 1870 by the St. Pancras Board of Guardians to train orphans and vagrant *street Arabs* as apprentices or for domestic service, the School had been designed by the same architects as the Asylum. It had always had a close relationship with the Hospital, often sharing entertainments, until its closure in 1931.



St Pancras Industrial School

“digging for victory”

On the outbreak of the Second World War, the Annexe, together with huts erected in its grounds, became an Emergency Medical Services hospital under the control of University College Hospital. After casualty treatment at the London teaching hospital, patients were moved out to sector hospitals such as the one at the Annexe. The

Emergency Hospital was replaced in 1943 by a hospital for wounded Canadian soldiers. Later requisitioned by the Khaki University of Canada and then used by Leavesden Green Teachers' Training College, the

Annexe was not returned to Leavesden Hospital until 1950, when the hatted hospital in its grounds became Abbots Langley Hospital for

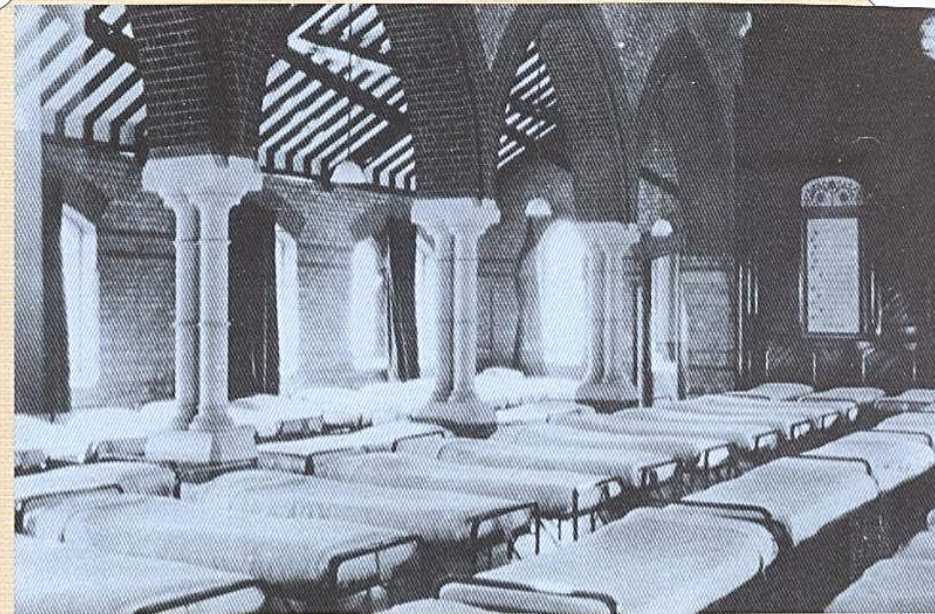
geriatric patients separate from Leavesden but under the same Hospital Management Committee. The wartime loss of the Annexe meant severe overcrowding on the main site, exacerbated by the evacuation to Leavesden of mentally handicapped children from Fountain Hospital, Tooting. In 1944, patients bombed out from St. Bernard's

Hospital, Hanwell were temporarily taken in. As in the Great War, the call up of male nurses resulted in staff shortages and a curtailment of some activities. The patients themselves dug for

victory on the farm and some were employed outside the Hospital, making their own contribution to the war effort.



The Annexe in the 1980s



The Chapel equipped with beds to deal with wartime overcrowding



The Annexe as Leavesden Base Hospital

**“a comprehensive
spital for the mentally
subnormal”**

designation under N.H.S., 1948

On 5 July 1948 Leavesden became part of the new National Health Service and was designated both as a mental hospital and an institution for defectives, a dual function made necessary by the acute shortage of beds in the North West Metropolitan Region for psychotic and mentally deficient patients. After 1950 it became an all purpose mental deficiency institution admitting the

entire age range of residents from children to geriatrics, but was no longer considered a mental hospital.

A Preliminary Training School for Nursing was opened in January 1948 and qualified Sister Tutors appointed to raise standards to the level of the General Nursing Council syllabus. Traditionally, practical ability had been higher than academic standards at Leavesden, but improved teaching was to raise all round standards over the next four decades. In addition to training for student nurses, a post-basic training unit was later set up for qualified staff. On 8 June 1973 Princess Alexandra of Kent presented prizes at the annual Nurses' Prizegiving.



Senior staff on the eve of the National Health Service

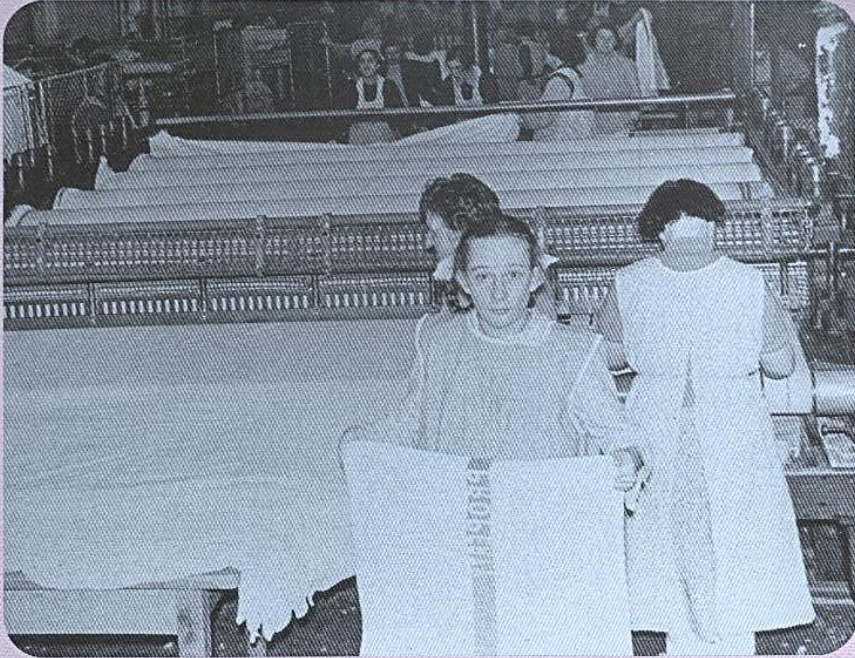
The admission of children prompted Leavesden to begin school classes for them in 1952, and on 19 April 1966 Princess Marina, Duchess of Kent, opened a purpose-built school for children and adolescents up to the age of 19. Control of this school was transferred to Hertfordshire Education Authority in 1972 and it was renamed Springfield School although it continued to be considered as Leavesden's School. It was reclassified as a further education institution in the 1990s because the majority of students are above the school leaving age.



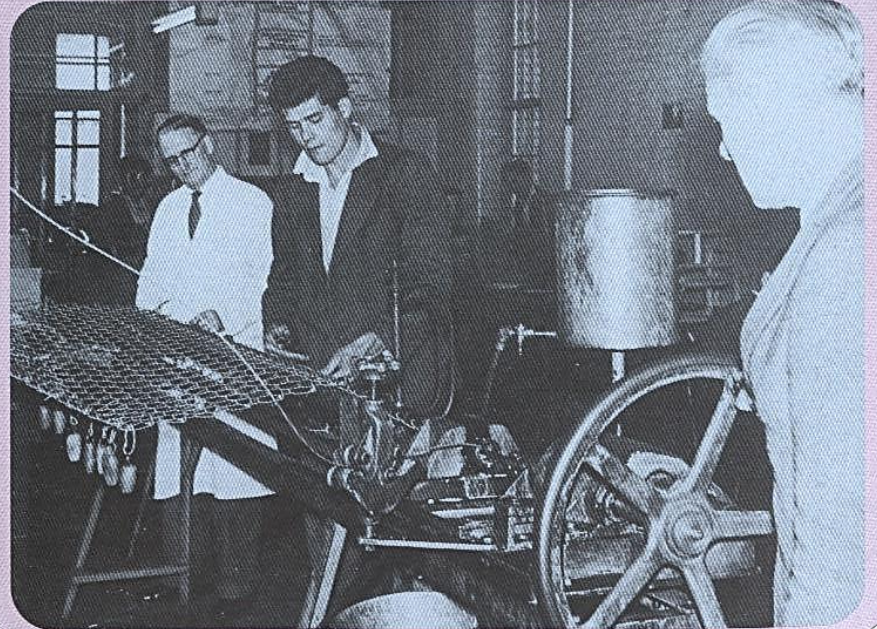
Princess Marina arriving for the opening of Springfield School, 19 April 1966



Education for the residents, 1960s



The residents had a variety of work available for them in the 1950s and 1960s



In the 1950s and 1960s, the emphasis on the treatment of patients began to change as the concept of community care gained acceptance although the idea of a therapeutic community was still seen as valid for some groups. Despite some opposition both from the



“care in a sheltered environment”

Dr E.W. Shepherd, Physician Superintendent, 1969

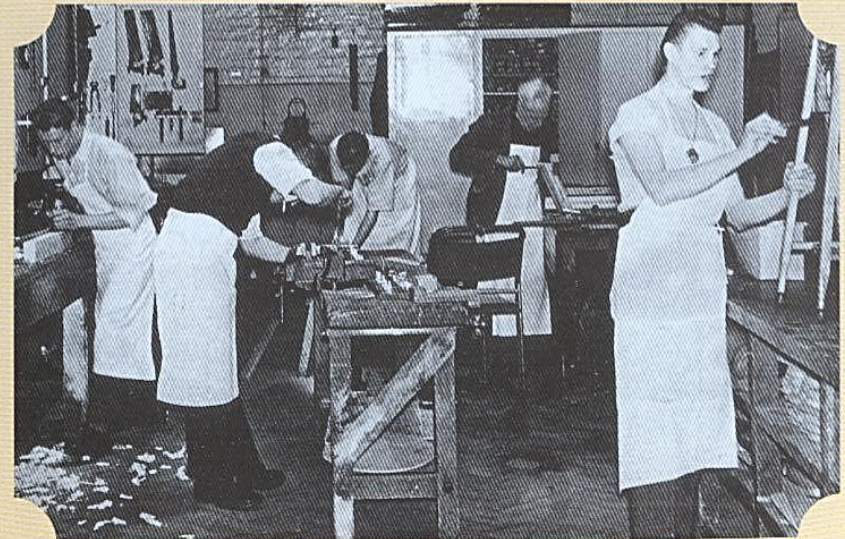
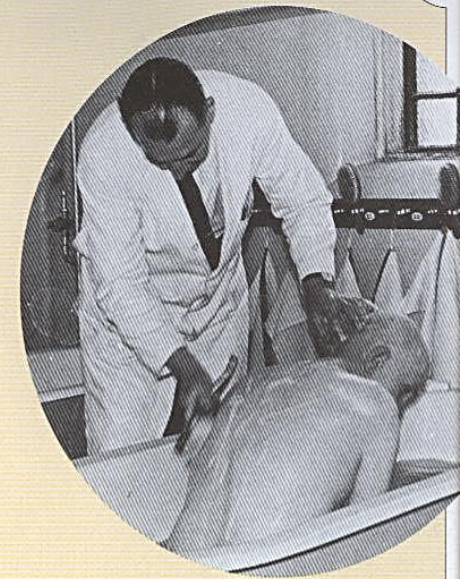
medical establishment and the traditionally well-organised trades unions to a changing

culture at Leavesden, a new liberalisation was gradually introduced and more attention given to the individual needs of the resident. A more open door approach was adopted and the Hospital psychologists, first appointed in 1950, recommended that many of the patients with IQs above 90 and a history of anti-social behaviour should have more contact with the outside world.

The wards became less institutional in feeling as they were slowly modernised and in 1969 were given the names of flowers, birds and trees instead of numbers. After 1957, patients began to be given personal issues of clothing. The sexes were not so strictly segregated, although it proved necessary to teach them contraception. In the more informal atmosphere of the 1970s and 1980s, when the nurses had stopped wearing uniform, the patients were given yet more freedom to visit the village of Abbots Langley and buy their own clothes and other personal possessions.

Work patterns for the patients changed and less of the work of the Hospital was undertaken by them, although some of the residents resented being superseded by domestic staff in cleaning the wards and working in the kitchens. Some patients still insisted on helping the porters to push food trolleys.

In 1959 support from Watford Manufacturers' Association, Watford Trades Council and local firms was mobilised for the formation of an Industrial Training Unit. After training in this self-supporting unit, the patient was assisted to find local employment as a preliminary to eventual resettlement in the community or in hostels.

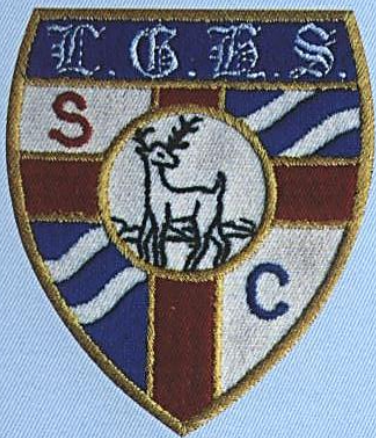


“a friendly relationship between all staff”

Social Club aims, 1939



Pulling a pint in the new Social Club



Staff Club badge

Leavesden continued to be noted for the excellence of its staff recreational activities in the post-war period. In 1966 a staff club house was opened with grants from the King's Fund and the Regional Hospital Board, and the range of activities continued to grow. However as Leavesden became less of a closed community and society changed in the outside world, sports gradually became less important.

One legacy of Leavesden's original isolation was its fire brigade. A Metropolitan Fire Brigade trained officer was first appointed in 1887, when all male attendants were expected to act as firemen. In 1900, this was reduced to a smaller team of trained and paid volunteers. A new

“a full Hospital fire service”

D. Bagley, Fire Officer, 19

fire prevention centre was opened in 1963 and again manned by a paid volunteer brigade formed from the staff. During the 1977-1978 National Firemen's Strike, the Hospital Fire Service was on call. The Brigade came into its own in 1989 when called upon to deal with a serious fire at Leavesden. As a result of this fire the long corridors were sectioned off with fire breaks.



Fire engine, c.1963

Hostel accommodation was provided by Leavesden, initially in 1960 at Ashbury Lodge and then after 1969 at Nascot Grange. This was intended as a halfway house between Hospital and independent living in the community for those patients working outside Leavesden. Pre-hostel training was made available for low-dependency residents before their discharge into the community.

bringing patients into the local community”

things are changing at Leavesden

the conscious aim of establishing closer links between the Hospital and the community from which the patient had come, supplementing the work of social workers and community nurses in liaising with the community and encouraging the resettlement of patients in their own localities.

In 1973 *sectorisation*, a scheme whereby each consultant was responsible for patients from particular boroughs within the catchment area, was introduced with



A patients' outing in the 1950s



The tradition of Christmas pantomimes continued in the 1970s and 1980s



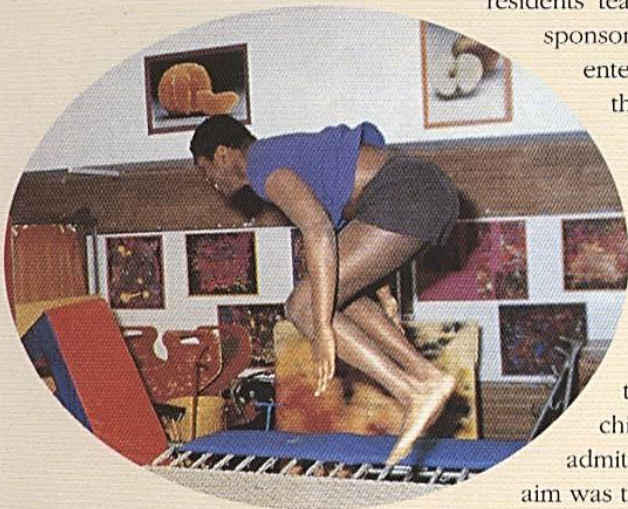
Eric Shepherd, Medical Superintendent

Leavesden was one of the first hospitals to provide a Secure Treatment Unit Service when it opened its Medium Secure Unit in 1975 for the admission of offenders who would otherwise have ended up in prison or in high security hospitals. At Leavesden it arose from the interest of Dr Eric Shepherd, consultant psychiatrist since 1952 and last Physician Superintendent from 1963 to 1981, in young delinquents with behavioural problems and unable to understand the implications of their actions. The residents of the Medium Secure Unit, renamed the Eric Shepherd Unit after the late Medical Co-ordinator when it was upgraded in 1985, were drawn from all over the country, not just Leavesden's traditional catchment areas.

one of the very first medium secure treatment units

*“a caring community
where all the staff mix
in a friendly, informal
way with patients”*

Things are changing at Leavesden, 1985



The Leavesden Football Team

Recreation for the patients showed increasing concern for the stimulation of the individual. A recreational officer was appointed to co-ordinate recreational therapy, including holidays, outings, art classes, hobbies and a play group. Club nights and social events were organised to encourage more active patient participation. In 1988, a

residents' team, trained and sponsored by the staff, was entered with honour for the first time in the Mini-Olympics for the mentally handicapped held at Cleethorpes.

The Friends of Leavesden was formed in 1955 by the parents of the children then being admitted to Leavesden. Its aim was to support the

Hospital by voluntary support and fundraising. Volunteers had long played an active role at Leavesden and in the 1970s helped to set up a pet's corner and landscape the old exercise courts. A major achievement of the Friends was the erection of "Friendly Leaves", a patients' clubhouse, in 1974, which volunteers helped to run.

In 1982 a residents' committee was formed from the patients at Leavesden and given the opportunity to make suggestions about their own welfare and the operation of "Friendly Leaves". The old attitude that the professionals and institution knew best was giving way to encouraging the residents to be more independent and, where possible, make their own decisions.



Building Pets Corner



Friendly Leaves



*“healthy outdoor exercise
and good healthy food”*

1985

The farm at Leavesden was run as a profit making concern from the establishment of the asylum. Fruit, vegetables and milk were produced for the use of residents and staff, and any surplus was then sold commercially. During two World Wars, the farm played its part in national food production. However, in 1955, the Ministry of Health recommended the gradual running down of hospital farms. The dairy

herd was sold off in 1956, the poultry in 1967 and the pigs in 1980, leaving only market gardening as an activity.

A Rural Craft Centre was set up in 1981-2 to teach residents horticultural skills. However as low dependency clients moved in to the community, the gardens and animal areas were adapted to the needs of higher dependency patients with more sensory areas, open spaces and play areas.



Rural Crafts Centre



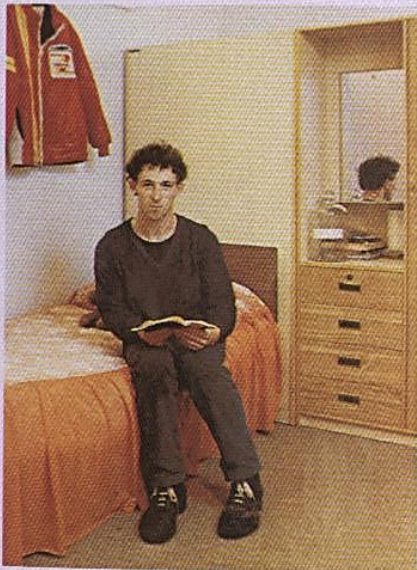
Farming and gardening in the 1950s



“committed to helping each of the residents to live as full a life as possible”

(1988)

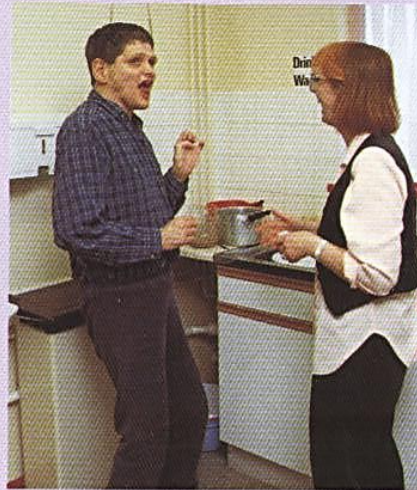
As early as 1971, it was realised that Leavesden would eventually be replaced by day and residential facilities in the local authority catchment areas and patients were being prepared for future transfer to hostels. As more facilities were set up in the community and older residents died, the number of residents at Leavesden



A resident's bedroom in the 1980s

gradually decreased and those remaining at Leavesden tended to be the more difficult to place.

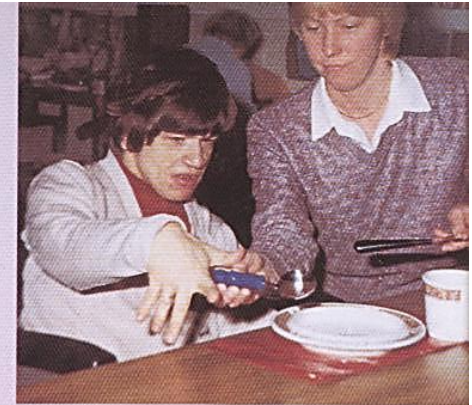
The eventual closure of the Hospital, which became more likely after 1986, when Leavesden transferred from South West Hertfordshire to North



West Hertfordshire Health Authority and became linked with Harpersbury and Cell Barnes Hospitals, was the logical outcome of the successful resettlement of residents. As the pace of resettlement gathered momentum and the number of residents began to shrink, a policy of phased contraction was introduced with the gradual contraction of the Annexe site and a concentration of services on the main site. This was in line with the policy of North-West Thames Regional Health Authority, which recognised the urgency of dealing with the large institutions such as Leavesden and in investing in the necessary changes.

Meanwhile more resources were put into providing for the needs of the more severely disabled and for the elderly.

In 1988 the Progressive Developmental Unit, a multi-disciplinary setting for the work of nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists and other staff, was set up. The unit offered training and day care activities for residents with multiple handicaps, for whom resettlement in



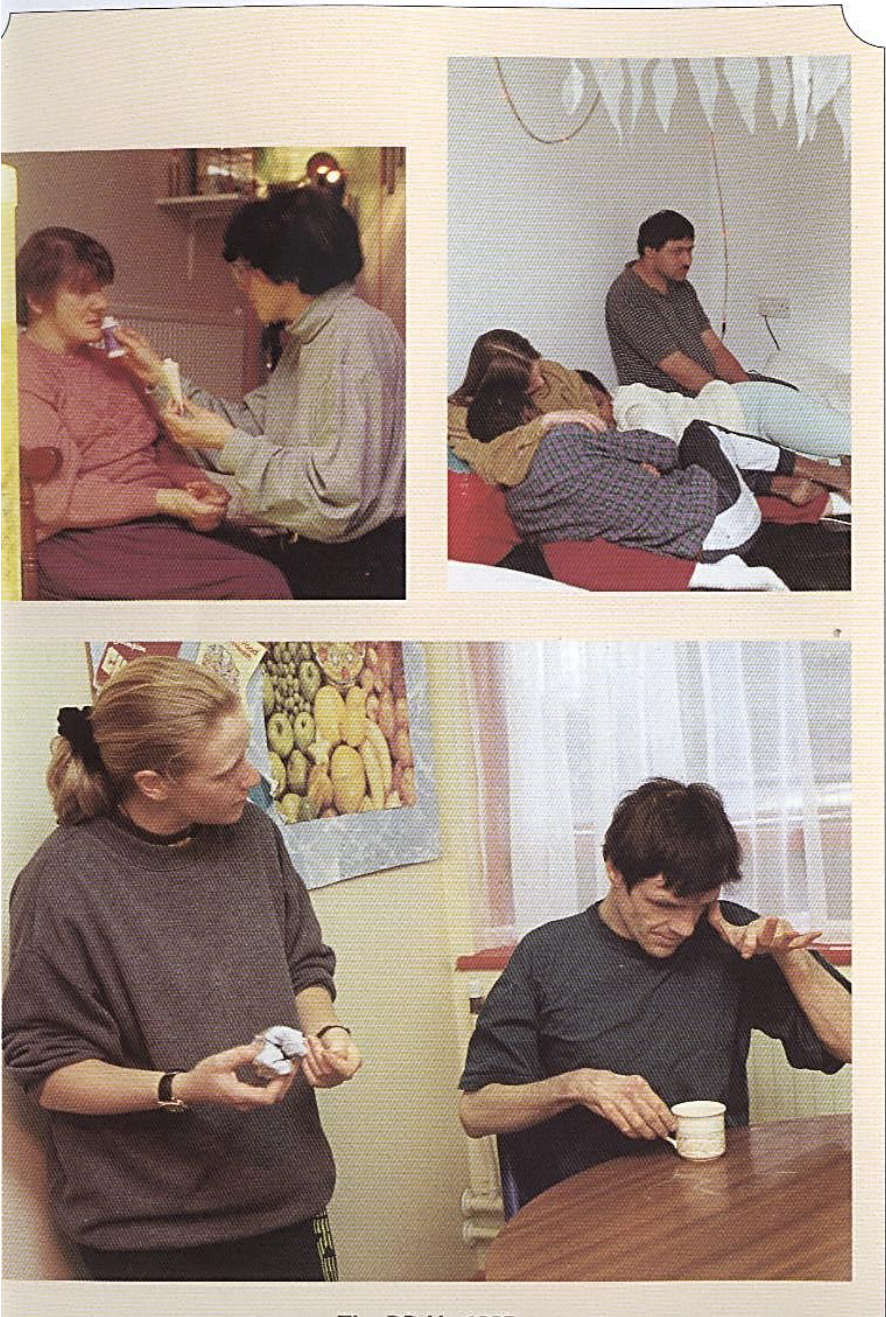
Occupational Therapy, 1995

the community was always more difficult.

In 1992 the Annexe was closed and services transferred to the main site at Leavesden. Land was sold for housing development. The sale of hospital staff housing had already reduced the

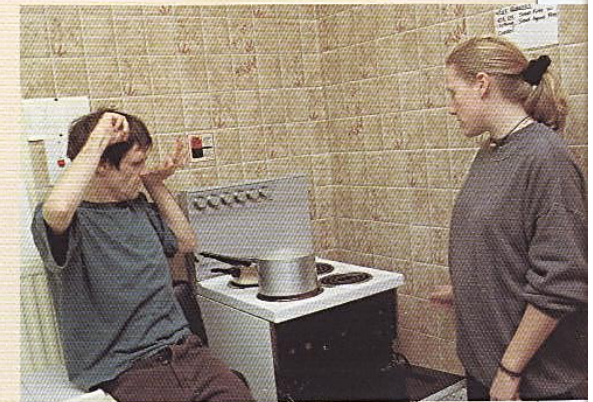
sense of a self-contained community with newcomers moving into houses that had once been exclusively Leavesden staff enclaves and many staff now living further away from the Hospital, new patterns reflecting wider social change.





Leavesden became the focus in 1988 of national opposition to the clinical regrading of National Health Service nursing staff. The night nurses at Leavesden took industrial action in protest against their regrading and for a time some residents found themselves sleeping in the Recreation Hall because of the lack of night supervision, which became dependent upon the services of volunteers until the action ended.

Throughout the 1990s great efforts were made to maintain a positive atmosphere and environment as Leavesden Hospital gradually became smaller. Emphasis was placed on changing staff attitudes from the old custodial outlook to the encouragement of participation by the residents. Individual care plans were successfully introduced for the residents with a concern for the particular needs of the individual client in place of the previous policy of planning for general care for residents on a block basis. In addition to planning for the future needs of each individual resident, resources were also put into the training of staff for their own futures once Leavesden did eventually close. Standards and morale were maintained, whilst an orderly, planned closure was effected by Horizon NHS Trust for those with learning disabilities, to whom control of the hospitals of the former North-West Hertfordshire Mental Handicap Unit had now passed, with Leavesden scheduled to close in October 1995.



After the closure of Leavesden, Springfield School and the Eric Shepherd Unit, rebuilt on the main site, will remain. The closure of the Hospital represents a successful end to the policy of resettlement of the residents in the community. Reflected in the history of Leavesden is the shift in attitudes from the Victorian belief in the isolation of mental and moral defectives to the modern emphasis on the needs of the individual and integration into the community.



Detail from mural by Philip Hinsley commemorating the visit of the Duchess of York, 22 March 1888

For 125 years, Leavesden has successfully served those with learning disabilities according to the prevailing and changing ideas of the times.

It leaves a positive legacy.

“The closure of Leavesden Hospital will mark another milestone in the strategy of ensuring services for people with learning disabilities are provided in more homely and community environments rather than in hospitals. This process of resettlement leads to an improved quality of life for those people who are moved from hospitals.”

Tom Sackville, Under-Secretary for Health, March 1995

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