



BEST OF HEALTH

130 Years of BHSF 1873 - 2003



PETER J MASKELL



BEST OF HEALTH

130 YEARS

OF

BHSF

1873 - 2003

Peter J Maskell

Published by BHSF Group Limited 2003

PREFACE

On 6 January 2003, the BHSF Board (formerly known as the Executive Council) met to carry out the routine business of the Company. It was of course a very special meeting since it marked the 130th anniversary of the founding of BHSF, the inaugural meeting having taken place on 6 January 1873 with John Skirrow Wright in the Chair and Joseph Sampson Gamgee as Honorary Secretary.

Much has happened in those 130 years. Previous publications have charted the history of the Fund - notably a "65 Year History of the BHSF 1873 - 1938", "The Golden Years 1873 - 1973" and "Kewstoke Convalescence Centre in Wartime". This new book builds on those previous and excellent historical accounts, and provides new information and illustrations not previously captured. In his book, Peter Maskell the author and current Chief Executive of BHSF, describes the social, political and economic changes that have taken place during the life of BHSF - and how the direction of the Fund has by necessity changed in order to maintain its relevance and contribution to society's medical and charitable needs.

I feel honoured to have succeeded Sir David Perris as Chairman of this great organisation. My involvement with the former Executive Council of BHSF dates back to 1988, shortly after I joined Cadbury Limited as their Company Medical Adviser. The Cadbury family have a long and prestigious association with social infrastructure and healthcare in Birmingham. During the inter-war years, when it was determined that a site should be found in order to build a new hospital, it was Cadbury Brothers who in 1925 donated 150 acres of land adjoining Birmingham University in order for the new hospital to be built. This is of course the site of the current Queen Elizabeth Hospital.

Long before that time, employees had been contributing to BHSF and the Bournville Works Magazine of January 1914 records that: "At a recent meeting of the Directors, it was agreed to increase the Firm's contribution in 1914 to half the total contribution of office, men and women; previously their contribution had been one third of the amount."

By then, the Cadbury business at Bournville had become established as the largest contributor to BHSF amongst some 2190 firms in Birmingham.

Anyone who has had the privilege and the honour to be associated with BHSF can take pride in what has been achieved over its 130 year history. None of us associated with the Company today will ever forget the past, our

roots and the journey BHSF has taken to arrive at its current form and structure. As to the future, the ever-changing and dynamic environment in which our business operates will demand that we do not stand still. As in the past, the challenge for us will be to ensure that we continue to be amongst the very best at what we do; and that despite the need to operate in an increasingly competitive marketplace, we will do so with the same high standards of professionalism and ethical behaviour that have served BHSF so very well during its 130 year history. Long live BHSF!

Paul Kanas



BHSF Chairman, Dr Paul Kanas

VICTORIAN BIRMINGHAM

Enough history of Birmingham has been published to fill a sizeable bookshelf. There is no doubt that the energy and enterprise of those who made Birmingham the great City which it is today were unrivalled and many of the famous names of industry and commerce have their origins here. For instance, in the commercial area, each of the big four British banks has its roots in or very strong connections with the City. HSBC, of which Midland Bank was a major component, started life as the Birmingham and Midland Bank. Lloyds TSB began as Taylor and Lloyd's Bank. Barclays developed out of the Birmingham District and County Banking Company Limited established in 1836. Meanwhile Natwest includes in its forerunners Rotten and Scholefield's Bank, formed in 1806.

However, Birmingham is probably more immediately known as the workshop of the world, or as the City of a thousand trades. 19th century commentators were struck by the quantity and diversity of Birmingham's goods. They were also impressed by the sound of their production. The French historian, Alexis Tocqueville, explained in 1835 that the town was "an immense workshop, a huge forge, a vast shop" in which "nothing was audible because of the sound of labour", and 12 years later, Hugh Miller declared that nowhere else in the world were "the mechanical arts more noisy". But no writer bettered Charles Dickens in bringing to the ears of his readers the clamour of manufacture. He did so through the persons of Mr Pickwick and Sam Weller when they entered "the great working town of Birmingham".

"As they rattled through the narrow thoroughfares leading to the heart of the turmoil, the sights and sounds of earnest occupation struck more forcibly on the senses. The streets were thronged with working people. The hum of labour resounded from every house; lights gleamed from the long casement windows in the attic storeys, and the whirl of wheels and the noise of machinery shook the trembling walls. The fires, whose lurid sullen light had been visible for miles, blazed fiercely up in the great works and factories of the town. The din of hammers, the rushing of steam, and the dead heavy clanking of engines, was the harsh music which arose from every quarter." (Charles Dickens, *The Posthumous Papers of Mr Pickwick*, 1837.)

It was the singing of metal and the hissing of water which had given rise to Birmingham's pre-eminence as a manufacturing centre. But the town's transformation into a place of international significance was effected not just because of the craft of its workers. It was also due to the willingness of its industrialists to invest in each other's inventions and businesses; and because they were able to send out their wares to the markets of the globe via a good transport system.

In the shadow of all this industry and enterprise, the ordinary man and woman and their children often suffered a pretty wretched existence. Living conditions generally were very poor indeed in the middle of the 19th century. The great social changes to be initiated by Joseph Chamberlain did not begin until rather later and took time to be really effective.

The Public Health Act was passed in 1848 and Birmingham Corporation immediately requested that an "enquiry into the sanitary health of the Borough be made in order that a local Board of Health could be established under the powers of the Act". So it was that Robert Rawlinson visited the town twice in 1849 and published his report. Although the picture he painted was not as black as that of Manchester, Liverpool or London, there was still considerable room for improvement.

The population was 220,000 of which almost one quarter lived in 2,000 courts in the town centre and it would be many years before this basic pattern was changed. Most of the courts were "back-to-backs" or "tunnel-backs" with the small properties crowded together and often with multi-occupancy. Public sewers were few and in many places drainage was non-existent. Those courts that had privies had too few of them and sewage often found its way into the River Rea, the canals and the streets.

Rawlinson's report also identified a number of other causes of ill-health apart from over-crowding and the lack of sanitation. One was the parlous state of the water as the underground water

supply and the River Tame were both polluted.

The enquiry by Dr Hill, Medical Officer of Health, into the conditions in the town centre in 1875 prior to the implementation of the Artisans' Dwellings Act showed little apparent improvement on this situation: "... want of ventilation, want of light, want of proper and decent accommodation resulting in dirty habits, low health and debased morals on the part of the tenants." The consequence of all this was a terrible mortality rate, particularly among children. From 1851 to 1861 there were 34,517 infant deaths in a population of 290,000. Even in 1875 the death rate in St Mary's Ward, at 26.82 per 1,000 was twice the level in Edgbaston. Zymotic diseases (smallpox, diphtheria, whooping-cough, diarrhoea and so on) were rife. Other social and health problems were reflected by a report that many of the inmates of the County Lunatic Asylum were found to be suffering from post-natal depression, epilepsy or alcoholism. There has probably never been an era when there was such a need for good medical care and yet it was not freely available. It was against this background that the Birmingham Hospital Saturday Fund came into being.



Typical 19th century courtyard housing