

GAMGEE'S LEGACY

Gamgee had worked enormously hard on this brainchild and out of Hospital Saturday grew various other contributory schemes and hospital savings associations, the pattern being copied all over the Midlands and beyond. It was said that his idea had given the greatest impetus to the co-operation of the working classes in support of our medical institutions.

It was a matter of great regret when in September 1873, having worked so untiringly and successfully for the Hospital Saturday Fund, Gamgee found it necessary to resign his position as Honorary Secretary. His services were acknowledged by the presentation of a public testimonial.

In 1882, when aged 53, Gamgee became severely ill with nephritis and he could no longer remain on the active list at the Queen's Hospital. This was a great blow but worst of all was the fact that he had no savings and his liabilities were considerable. He had earned well but had often been over-generous and provided every luxury for his wife. In retirement, he continued to consult, write, lecture and take part in many professional activities, as best he was able.

Four years later, in August 1886, while enjoying a holiday with his two sons at his favourite resort, Dartmouth, he fell in the street and fractured his femur. He was taken home to Birmingham where two surgeons were sent for; they gave him ether, thoroughly examined him, and packed him up with splints and sandbags. However, he did not recover. His old kidney trouble was to prove too much of a handicap and after a few days of acute illness he died on 18 September at the age of 57.

His funeral was held at Handsworth Old Church in Birmingham and thousands of men, women and children lined the streets to bid him a last farewell. He was greatly loved and many fine tributes were paid to his professional work, his skill in surgery, his teaching and his devotion to his patients. Gamgee left no money but his widow and children were well cared for by Lawley Parker, his brother-in-law.

Gamgee had been President of the Birmingham Medical Institute and to this day an annual lecture, sponsored by BHSF, is held at the Institute in his memory.

He is also remembered in connection with Gamgee tissue, a surgical dressing of absorbent cotton wool and gauze, which he patented and which is still in use.

Further, Gamgee's name will be familiar to those who know the works of J R R Tolkien. Tolkien was not born until six years after Gamgee's death but he moved to Birmingham as a child and was educated and lived much of his life in the City. He would have been aware of Gamgee and gave one of the principal characters in "The Lord of the Rings" the name Sam Gamgee.

THE SMEDLEY YEARS

To succeed Gamgee, William T Smedley, a Chartered Accountant, was appointed Honorary Secretary on 15 January 1874. At first he continued along the lines already laid down, but as time went on his vision and flair helped to shape and expand the influence of BHSF.

The second annual collection was held on 14 March 1874. The Treasurer, Joseph Beattie, with a staff of clerks, received the contributions at the Birmingham Joint Stock Bank, Temple Row West (with whose successor, Lloyds TSB, BHSF still banks). The collection totalled £4,132 and after expenses, the amount actually divided amongst the hospitals was £3,800.

After that, the amount collected annually steadily decreased until 1879. Experience proved that the collection was dependent upon the state of the local economy and when trade conditions were poor, the working of overtime was out of the question. Smedley pressed for a change in the procedure and the Committee consented to the systematic canvassing of all firms to replace the annual collection with contributions of 1d per week all year round. It was felt this would be less of a burden on the contributor and at the same time produce a greater result than an effort made on any one day. The change was a success and collections increased year by year. In 1891 £10,867 was collected.

Each hospital received a donation in proportion to the amount of its annual expenditure. In 1883 the hospitals agreed to the appointment of a Hospital Saturday representative to their governing bodies and these people were able to report on the extent of the care and economy exercised in the financial management of each hospital.

In 1884 a street collection was organised on Hospital Saturday and this raised £67 15s 6d, setting the pattern for a number of years ahead in order to swell the funds available.

Smedley had visions far beyond the mere collection and distribution of money, though.

Over 18 years, £107,304 had been collected and disbursed as originally intended, which seemed to establish the Fund simply as a collecting agency for the hospitals. Smedley's vision was to continue this good work but to extend the sphere of usefulness by opening a convalescent home, setting up a nursing service and establishing a surgical aid department. At first the Committee did not take to these ideas with enthusiasm, but eventually saw the wisdom of proceeding in this way. The local hospitals were originally apprehensive that their income might be diminished but were assured by the Fund that they could rely upon at least £10,000 per annum, and maybe more, because collections would increase year by year as subscribers were attracted by the convalescence service.

The Fund could not own property without being incorporated. Hence, on 29 December 1891 the Fund was registered under the Companies Act as a company "not for profit" to be known as "The Birmingham Hospital Saturday Fund". The Memorandum and Articles of Association were published and every contributing group was given the right to appoint a delegate member to the Board of Delegates which met several times a year in addition to the annual general meeting. The management of the business was in the hands of an Executive Committee, 40 strong, with various sub-committees. Important matters were reported by the Executive Committee to the Board of Delegates, maintaining a feeling of close contact with the contributors.

Smedley provided the motive power that got the organisation under way and in the early stages much of the direction was his also. His was a mission of heroic proportions and his involvement for 30 years laid the firmest of foundations for the future.

Sadly his move to London made it necessary for him to resign in 1904. The Committee profoundly regretted the loss of one who had been both architect and mainspring of BHSF. He was elected a Vice President, a post he retained until his death in 1934 at the age of 83. It is remarkable that no civic or national honours were awarded to recognise his outstanding contribution, but at BHSF his name is remembered with pride.

Later Honorary Secretaries, Messrs W S Aston and H C Aston were William Smedley's nephews. They were articled to him professionally, and undoubtedly schooled by him in the field of voluntary endeavour and public service. This family link therefore continued for BHSF's first 72 years.

Interestingly, Smedley wrote in August 1931 when aged almost 80, that some of his developments were in the face of quite staunch opposition. For instance, he claimed that for several years there was severe and unfair criticism conducted principally through the Birmingham Gazette opposing strongly the weekly collection which he introduced and which was the foundation of BHSF's funding. He also referred to another battle over the establishment of the first convalescent home and the registration of BHSF as a company not for profit. A member of the Executive Committee, Leonard Brierley



William T Smedley

opposed the convalescent home idea and Mr G J Johnson, the Honorary Solicitor, opposed the not for profit idea. These issues, combined with the apprehension of the local hospitals about funding, could have scuppered the whole idea but Smedley seized the opportunity of the breakdown in health of the Chairman, Alderman Cook (who had been ordered abroad, to Egypt for the winter) and he carried through these milestone developments.

TYN-Y-COED

The convalescence service was launched with the acquisition of Tyn-y-Coed, about two miles from Llandudno. This was a solid house built of local stone in a 33 acre estate including a small farm, which BHSF still owns, with six cows – and soon afterwards a calf – plus poultry and a horse.

The intention was to borrow the purchase money on the best possible terms when a most generous offer came from Miss Henrietta and Miss Sarah Stokes of Edgbaston, Birmingham, to pay the full amount of £7,500 in memory of their brother, the late Mr Alfred Stokes, a wealthy and highly-respected merchant of Birmingham. Tyn-y-Coed was therefore named the Alfred Stokes Memorial Home.

Stokes had never taken an active part in politics or public affairs but throughout his life he used his wealth for the benefit of less fortunate citizens in causes too numerous to mention. For instance, he would donate a guinea (£1.05) to over 1,000 charities annually. In addition he

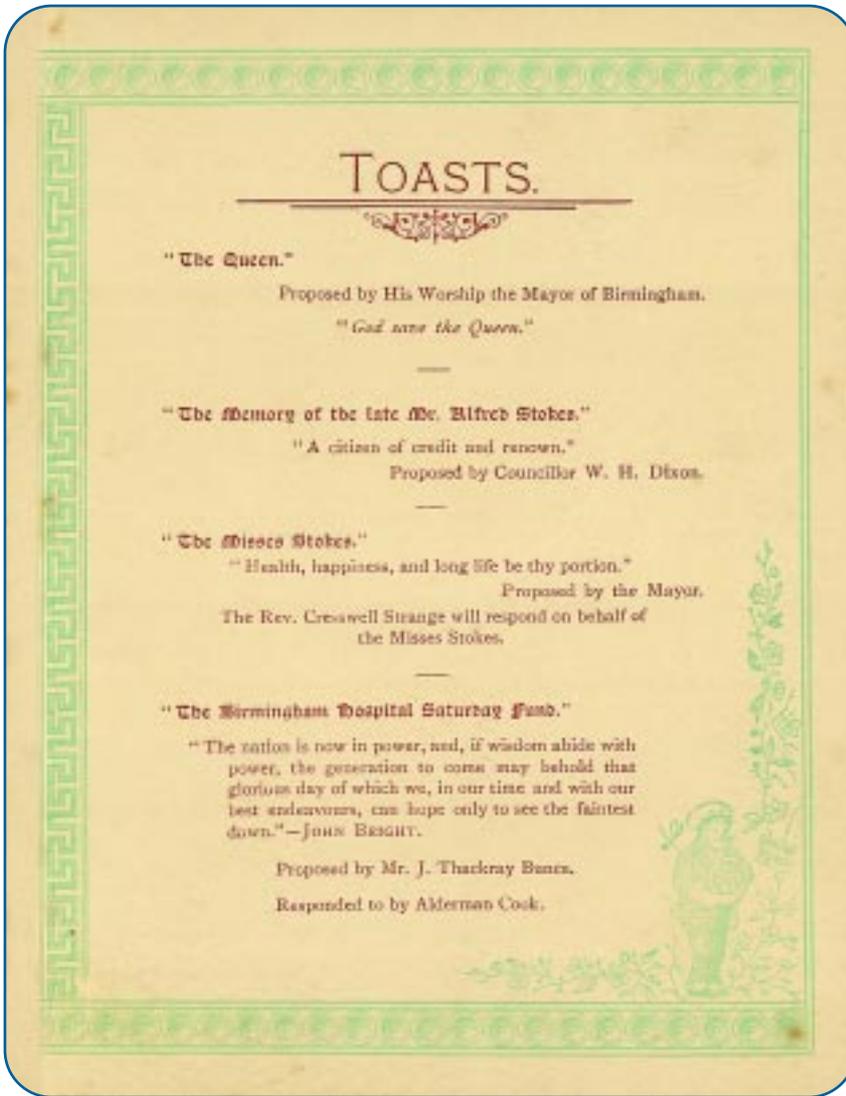
was a big supporter of local hospitals and many other good causes. Stokes was a bachelor, living unpretentiously with his sisters until his death in 1890.

The first AGM of the new Board of Delegates, held in the Council Chamber on 14 February 1892 and presided over by the Mayor of Birmingham, gratefully accepted the gift from the Misses Stokes and commissioned an illuminated album for presentation to them. There was a facility for the Board to elect as life members any persons who had rendered special service to BHSF, and this power was first exercised in so appointing Henrietta and Sarah Stokes.

Tyn-y-Coed was converted and equipped to accommodate 41 male patients and the necessary staff. There were many generous gifts including a magnificent donation of £1,500 from the Misses Stokes so that Tyn-y-Coed could be opened free of debt. The ladies were present at the official opening by the Mayor of



The official opening of Tyn-y-Coed, 21 May 1892



Toast list at the luncheon at the opening of Tyn-y-Coed

Birmingham, Alderman Lawley Parker, on 21 May 1892.

Tyn-y-Coed was an instant success. Patients and their employers often expressed appreciation of this great boon to the City. Sick workers recovered and returned to work much sooner after a stay at Tyn-y-Coed and many of the men made new friendships and developed a deep sense of comradeship.

The first matron, Miss F E Melson, who remained at Tyn-y-Coed for 32 years, accepted the post at a salary of £40 per annum plus free board and lodging, and her deputy received £25 per annum. There was no mention in the records of a

40 hour working week and holidays with pay! The matron had supreme responsibility over the whole establishment. A bailiff was employed to work the farm, and a gardener took charge of the gardens and vineries, supplying much of the produce used at the house. The cost of maintaining a patient worked out at 1s per day, and for the whole week including all overheads, the average cost was 16s 6d. Daily reports of all that transpired had to be sent to the office in Birmingham and the Executive Committee had monthly statements of costs to ensure that every care was taken with the finances.

Tyn-y-Coed was available to men who lived or were employed within a radius of five miles of Birmingham Town Hall. Preference was

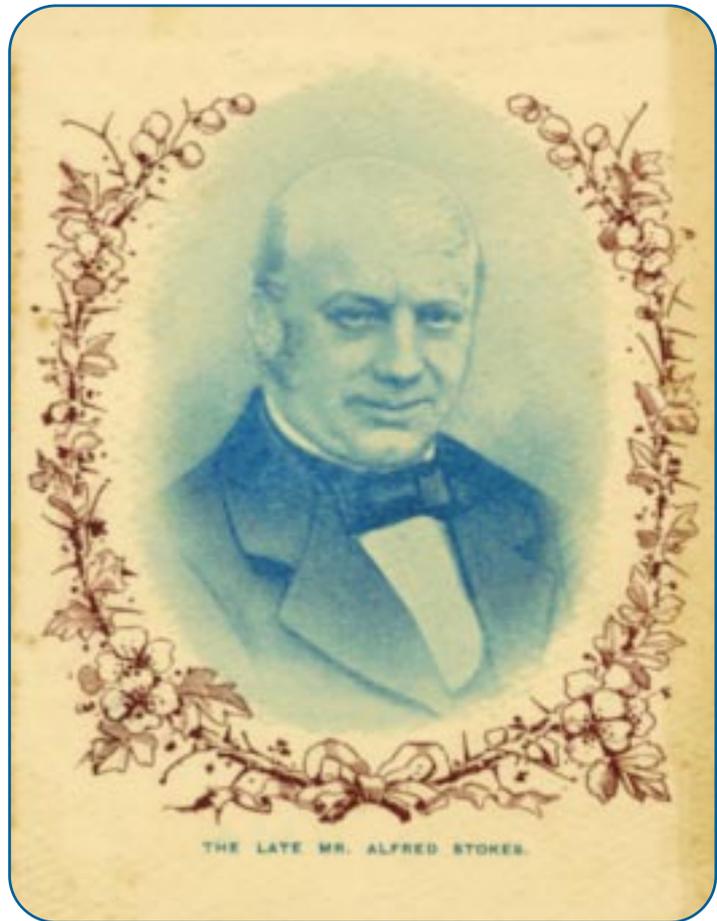
naturally given to applicants who regularly subscribed to the Fund. Patients paid 10s (50p) towards the return rail fare. They were met at Llandudno and taken to Tyn-y-Coed by horse drawn omnibus for their stay which normally lasted two weeks. The men were responsible for their own social arrangements. There were many happy fishing trips, leisurely drives with carriage and horses, cricket, bowls, gentle walks and musical evenings. One of the patients would be appointed "Captain" and he would arrange all these activities and entertainments. He would have assistants, two of whom bore the extraordinary title of "Slipper" – the slipper would ride outside the horse bus and, before going downhill, his duty was

to insert under one of the wheels a kind of iron shoe or slipper which acted as a brake by stopping the wheel revolving. This contraption had to be retrieved and stowed away at the bottom of the hill.

In December 1893 Henrietta and Sarah Stokes generously gave £2,000 for the purchase of 12 neighbouring acres of land which were previously only rented and when in 1899 it was decided to enlarge Tyn-y-Coed to accommodate 64 patients, they donated a further £5,100 to cover the cost. In total these generous ladies gave £17,010 to make it all possible. Even after their lifetime there remained a legacy in the form of an investment of £2,500, the income from which was to assist with repairs.

In following years Tyn-y-Coed was twice extended to a final capacity of 125 patients. In 1927, after an extension, the building was reopened by the Right Honourable Neville Chamberlain, MP, who was at that time Minister of Health. During almost 78 years of service, 130,000 patients were cared for at Tyn-y-Coed.

So much depended upon the success of Tyn-y-Coed that Smedley missed no opportunity to personally supervise and direct this service to the highest standards and to make sure that every potential contributor in Birmingham knew of the advantages available for such a modest premium. Smedley visited the home fortnightly and thus personally met every patient. A "home club" was formed for ex-patients and monthly meetings were held where men could renew friendships and spend social time together. The interest fostered in this way did much to



Mr Alfred Stokes

widen the influence of BHSF and build up its reputation of service. However, such was the success of the home club that it became impossible to find adequate accommodation for the monthly meetings which were abandoned in favour of an annual social meeting at the Town Hall where Smedley would give an enthusiastic address and an update of progress made by BHSF. Smedley also edited a monthly magazine which promoted the work of BHSF by reporting current activities and encouraging support for further plans of which his agile brain never seemed to be short. This magazine, "Forward", was very aptly named and did much to advance the work of BHSF during the nine years of its publication up to 1901, the early issues being heavily subsidised by Smedley himself.