

SURGICAL AIDS DEPARTMENT

In 1893, £150 was used to commence a surgical aids department for the provision for contributors of surgical appliances, medical aids, artificial limbs and so on. Applications were made through Delegates and considered by the Applications Sub-Committee. By special arrangement with suppliers, the necessary aids could be obtained at little more than cost price. In the case of needy applicants, payment from as little as 6d per week for these articles would be accepted over a period of time. This service continued until the 1940s.

HOME NURSING

The home nursing service began on 1 January 1893. BHSF agreed to pay to the District Nursing Association the amount of £62 10s 0d per quarter and on the recommendation of the Delegate, the Association would arrange for a trained nurse to visit the home of any contributor within certain areas of the City. This was a 12 month trial and any increase in cost to the Association as a result of visits to contributors would be met by BHSF. Maternity cases were excluded. However, the Executive Committee was disappointed in the lack of success of this arrangement and by the end of the trial period only 66 applications had been dealt with. It did eventually become more widely used, but was never a great success. Even so, BHSF continued to make an annual donation to the District Nursing Association.

AMBULANCES

In these early days, ambulances were few and were horse-drawn. In 1895 BHSF presented four specially-designed cycle ambulances made by Alldays and Onions Limited of Birmingham. These consisted of a detachable canvas stretcher set between two bicycles which were joined by weldless steel tubes and the resulting quadricycle measured about four feet across and eight feet in length. They were considered speedy, light and comfortable and were particularly useful at the scene of an accident because the injured person could be laid upon the detachable stretcher with a minimum of movement and, once at the hospital, the stretcher could be lifted onto a hospital bed without unduly disturbing the patient.

These appliances were regarded as a boon, and kept at the principal police stations, with factories being notified where they could be found in the event of accidents.

In 1932 an ambulance service under the auspices of the Birmingham Hospitals Contributory Association was voluntarily operated by members of the St John Ambulance Association. Contributors could use an ambulance, day or night, for the nominal charge of 2s 6d (12¹/₂p). BHSF thought this development was so progressive that they presented an ambulance, bringing the St John fleet to seven, and also contributed £500 towards the first year's working. This donation was repeated annually, and was increased to £5,000 per annum in 1939 when two further ambulances were also given.

In May 1936 300 volunteers were enlisted by BHSF's night volunteer motor service for the hospitals. The object of the service was to provide speedy transit to hospitals for relatives of dangerously ill patients and for blood donors between 11 pm and 6 am. The service operated within a radius of 25 miles from the centre of Birmingham. The slogan used to recruit volunteers was "A car, a telephone and a desire to serve". Within the first few

months 184 calls were made and at the end of the following year there were 388 volunteers and 502 calls had been answered from 29 hospitals. Relatives and patients alike were deeply grateful for the facility and the hospitals concerned expressed their unreserved appreciation for this humane and invaluable work, which operated until inevitable restrictions following the start of the Second World War made it impossible to continue.



In May 1895 the Fund presented four specially designed 'cycle ambulances'
 made by Alldays & Onions Ltd., Birmingham.
 The great objection to the horse ambulance was the maintenance cost of a horse and attendant.
 The quadricycle required no balancing and offered a speedy, light, and comfortable
 means of conveying injured persons to Hospital.

The Hospital Saturday ambulance – a page from "Forward" – May 1895

CONSULTATIVE MEDICAL AND SURGICAL INSTITUTION

Early in 1900 the Board of Delegates agreed to co-operate in the setting up of a Consultative Medical and Surgical Institution and a first instalment of £400 was paid towards the cost of furnishing consulting rooms and for working capital during the experimental stages. This Institution was not exclusive to BHSF's contributors, but was available to all who could afford to pay the fee of half a guinea (52½ p) for private consultation. Many prominent medical men were openly hostile and bitter controversy raged. However, the Institution quietly and steadily progressed throughout its first year as people took advantage of the specialised skill and attention made available to them. Then, although the need for such an Institution had been demonstrated, the objections of many doctors prevailed and its activities were forced to cease.

FUNDING DEVELOPMENTS

As BHSF's services became more popular, costs increased but never once was the £10,000 allocation to the medical charities for the local hospitals missed. From 1904 special arts and industries exhibitions were held at Bingley Hall, Birmingham. These and other efforts were to aid the Marle Hall Building Fund and in 1907 the outstanding debt on that home was cleared. No regular collection money was

ever used to purchase buildings which were always acquired through extra endeavours, generous gifts or an "extra penny a week".

In 1907 the collection amounted to over £20,000 and a silver cup was presented to the Chairman, Sir William Cook, in commemoration.



These athletic looking chaps are at the starting line for a race from Droitwich to Bromsgrove and back in aid of BHSF

ROMSLEY HILL SANATORIUM

In 1908 the death occurred of Sir William Cook, a founder member of the Hospital Saturday Movement and for 28 years Chairman of BHSF. It was agreed that his wonderful service should be commemorated by providing a sanatorium for the treatment of those suffering from consumption (tuberculosis). A special appeal was launched and workers were invited to contribute 2d per week for 26 weeks towards this goal. The site was to be on the southern slope of Romsley Hill, in 25 acres of partially-wooded land and was presented by a donor who remained anonymous.

The foundation stone was laid in 1911 by the Lord Mayor, Alderman Bowater, and the sanatorium was opened in 1913 to accommodate 50 patients who would have up to 10 weeks of treatment. However, in the meantime, the Insurance Act had come into force making the treatment of consumptive cases the responsibility of the local authority. It was therefore arranged to include the sanatorium in the City of Birmingham scheme, but still under BHSF management. For 12 years the sanatorium was successfully

operated in this way, with bed accommodation being increased over the period to 140.

Ultimately, however, it was thought best to transfer the sanatorium to the City Health Committee who also accepted responsibility for clearing the £25,659 debt still remaining on the building. It was also arranged that all BHSF patients suffering from consumption should be treated at Romsley Hill. Up to that time, 1926, 7,346 patients had benefited under the period of BHSF's management.



A football match procession to collect money for BHSF, March 1910

THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY

In 1912 the first National Insurance Act came into force and this resulted in so much confusion that many firms stopped their BHSF contributions. However, when it was pointed out that the benefits offered by BHSF were quite separate and distinct from those provided under the Insurance Act, most of the firms concerned resumed their membership.

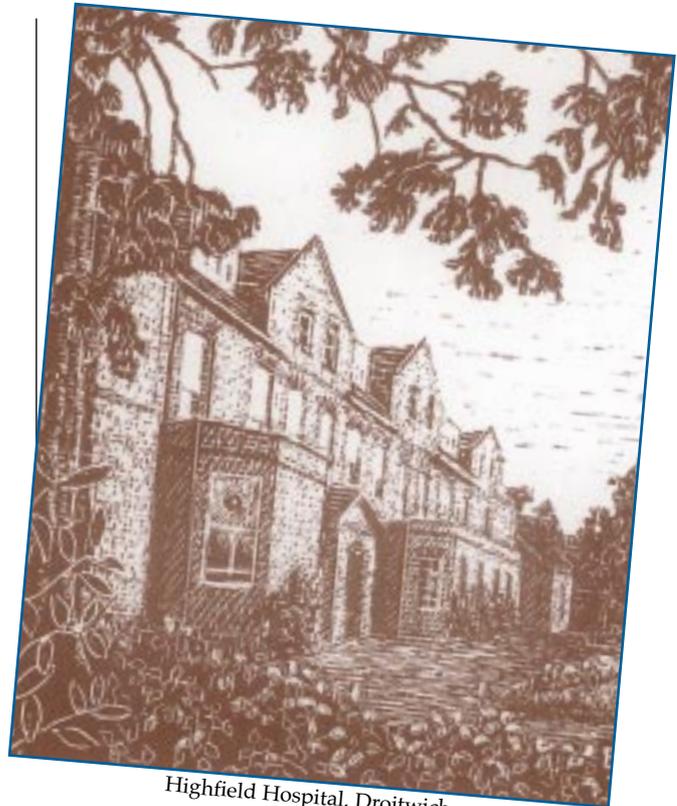
With the start of the Great War in 1914, many thousands of contributors left the City for war service. However, confidence in BHSF was so widespread that most of the new war-workers became contributors and collections actually increased enabling a gift to the medical charities in 1916 of £12,000 instead of the customary £10,000.

However, the Great War took its toll and the resources of the hospitals were strained to the utmost. The BHSF Committee realised that with the ending of war work, many of the new contributors would be permanently lost. In November 1918, therefore, there was unanimous approval of an increase in the contribution rate to 2d per week. In 1919, even though the full effect of the increased contribution had not then been felt and it was followed by a period of bad trade conditions, £20,000 was given to the medical charities. Despite the fact that there had been no improvement in the state of trade, in 1921 the grant to the medical charities was increased to £27,500, so urgent was their need.

HIGHFIELD HOSPITAL, DROITWICH

Another of BHSF's activities was the arrangement of brine baths for contributors. Droitwich in Worcestershire had become the centre for rheumatoid ailment treatment following an outbreak of cholera throughout the country in 1830. A person from Droitwich with cholera was ordered to take a hot bath immediately and in order to save time he was bathed in hot brine, as there was no hot water in the hospital at the time. The patient recovered and the treatment was given to other sufferers with great success. The healing power of brine became known and doctors flocked to the town to investigate and experiment with the brine, which led to amazing results especially in the treatment of rheumatism.

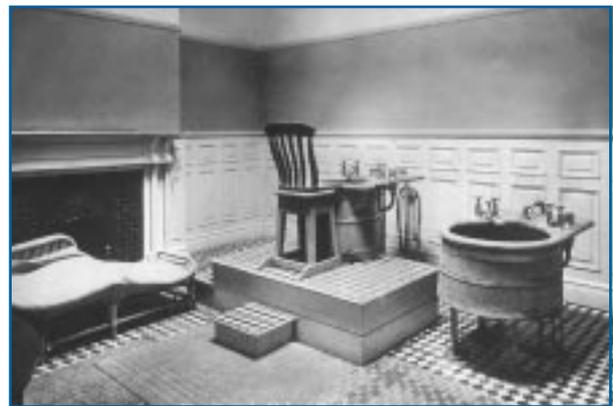
Demand for treatment increased year by year and in 1917 BHSF acquired Highfield Hospital for the treatment of male patients. In 1918 a new wing was opened for women and a further extension in 1927 allowed 47 men and 31 women to receive treatment. Great benefit and relief from suffering more than justified the acquisition



Highfield Hospital, Droitwich

of Highfield where the equipment was always kept up to date and included electrical, radiant heat and gymnasium treatment. There was no need for patients to be able to swim as the brine was so dense that a patient just floated close to the surface.

The hospital was handed over to the Ministry of Health in 1948 and treatments continued until 1982 when the brine baths were closed due to lack of use. Nonetheless Highfield Hospital continues as a specialist centre for rheumatoid care.



Droitwich brine baths – the aeration baths