In celebration of the 60th anniversary of the National Health Service 1948-2008

Diamond Days

A snapshot of 60 years of the NHS in Swansea, Neath, Port Talbot, Bridgend and the western Vale of Glamorgan

Compiled by Susan Bailey and Paul Batcup
Welcome to Diamond Days, a Snapshot of 60 Years of the NHS in Swansea, Neath, Port Talbot, Bridgend, and the western Vale of Glamorgan.

This publication doesn’t pretend to be a history of the area’s NHS in its first 60 years, but rather a glimpse into the memories of just some of the many thousands of staff and patients who played a part in the early days of the health service. It is a celebration of the health care that has gone before, and a brief look of what lays ahead.

The NHS is constantly evolving, and with the launch of the new ABM University NHS Trust in 2008—in parallel with the NHS 60th Anniversary Celebrations—our health care is moving forward into an exciting new era, promising to be even more innovative and rewarding.

The new Trust is the first in Wales to become a University Trust, and is working in partnership with Swansea University to bring cutting edge research to the bedside and direct patient care.
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Saturday, 5th July, 2008 marks the 60th anniversary of the NHS. In 1948, for the first time, prevention, diagnosis and treatment were brought together under one umbrella organisation to create one of the most comprehensive health services in the world: the NHS.

The NHS has shown the world the way to healthcare, not as a privilege to be paid for, but as a fundamental human right.

Over the last 60 years, the hard work and skills of NHS staff, coupled with medical progress, has continually helped drive up standards and quality of care for millions. People now live on average at least 10 years longer than they did in 1948.

Deaths from cancer and heart disease have fallen dramatically and Britain is one of the safest places in the world to give birth.

The NHS has shown the world the way to healthcare, not as a privilege to be paid for, but as a fundamental human right.

The values of the NHS - universal, tax funded and free at the point of need - remain as important today to the NHS as they were when it was launched in 1948.

The NHS has never stood still, it has changed and reformed to meet the public’s expectations and the needs of a changing society.

It’s easy to forget that the standards in the NHS we now take for granted were once novel. We take a look at how landmark events in the history of the NHS have grown to become successful healthcare procedures. Did you know that...

- In 1948, a cataract operation meant a week of total immobility with the patient’s head supported by sandbags. Eye surgery is now over within 20 minutes, and most patients are out of hospital the same day.

- In 1958, hip replacements were so unusual that the surgeon who invented them asked patients to agree to return them post-mortem. The NHS now carries out 1,000 of these replacements every week.

- The first UK heart transplant patient in 1968 only survived 46 days. The procedure is now routine enough for two dozen to be carried out in the same period.

- The world waited until 1978 for Britain to produce the first test-tube baby. 6,000 test-tube babies are now born here annually.

- The breast-screening programme introduced in 1988 now saves the lives of 1,400 women a year.
Welsh-born Aneurin Bevan was one of the most important ministers of the post-War Labour government and widely considered to be the chief architect of the National Health Service.

He was born on 15 November 1897 in Tredegar, the son of a miner, and grew up with first-hand experience of the problems of poverty and disease.

He left school at 13 to work in the local colliery and soon became a trades union activist, winning a scholarship to study in London. During the 1926 General Strike Bevan he emerged as one of the leaders of the South Wales miners, and three years later was elected as labour MP for Ebbw Vale.

He was appointed Minister of Health, following the 1945 election and made responsible for establishing the National Health Service. Just three years later, on the 5th July 1948, the Government became responsible for all medical services and the population of the UK enjoyed free diagnosis and treatment for all.

In 1959 Aneurin Bevan became leader of the Labour Party, although he was already terminally ill. He died the next year, on 6th July, 12 years and a day after the NHS was established.
Below, the 1948 leaflet informing the public about the new National Health Service. Bottom, details of the 1946 NHS Act.

The National Health Service Act, 1946

1. A totally free medical service provided for all. This included doctors’ consultations, prescriptions, hospital treatment and all dental and ophthalmic services.
2. All hospitals were nationalised.
3. Twenty Regional Hospital Boards were formed to administer the hospitals.
4. Local authorities retained responsibility for the health services they already operated (e.g. ambulance services, maternity and child welfare, home nursing, school medical services).
5. Separate Executive Councils were set up to administer family doctor services, dental, ophthalmic and pharmaceutical services. There were 138 of these.
The first baby born in the NHS was Mrs Aneira Thomas, from Loughor, who celebrated her 60th birthday at 00.01 am on 5th July, 2008. Here’s her story:

“I was the first baby to be born into the NHS. I was born a minute after midnight on 5th July, 1948 in the Amman Valley Hospital, weighing 6lb 6ozs. My mother was Edna May Rees, and my father was Will Rees. He was a miner and we lived in Cefneithin, near Cross Hands. When my mother was in labour the nurses kept telling her hang on, hang on, so I would be born after midnight and be the first NHS baby, and I was born one minute after midnight. One of the nurses who delivered me, Nurse Richards, suggested I be named Aneira, after Aneurin Bevan.

“When I was small I couldn’t understand why I had my unusual name and I didn’t really like it. I wanted to be called something like Sian, like my friends were. But when I went to Grammar School, and the teachers asked me about my name, I began to realise how proud I should be of it. My family have always called me Nye, just like Aneurin Bevan. The NHS has played an important part in my family’s life. All my sisters were nurses and my father’s two sisters were matrons in Cardiff and Gloucester. I used to be a mental health worker.

“When the NHS was 50, the Richard and Judy Show heard about me and asked me to go to London. But because my mother wasn’t well enough for the journey they sent a film crew here instead. I was very pleased she was alive then to be able to take part in the celebrations. The Daily Mirror also wrote about me. I’m very proud to be the first baby born into the NHS.”

Pictured below: Mrs Thomas cuddles Swansea newborn Hannah, at a special visit to Singleton Hospital's Maternity Unit to celebrate the 60th Anniversary of the NHS. Pictured with her is Hannah’s mum, Rachel Longley, from Gorseinon. The second picture shows First Minister Rhodri Morgan presenting Mrs Thomas with a bouquet. Mrs Thomas also revealed that Singleton Hospital held a special place in her heart after staff there saved the life of her grand-daughter, Caitlin, after complications during her birth.
Not long after Aneira was born, and when the NHS was just three minutes old, Margaret Williams came into the world on July 5th 1948 in Maesteg.

With healthcare being a paid service before the NHS came into being, her father Islwyn had already christened her the ‘10 shilling baby’ because that’s what he had to pay the day before.

But luckily, that was the last time as Aneurin Bevan’s long-held ideal that good healthcare should be available to all, regardless of wealth, was launched.

“My father always told me I only cost him 10 shillings,” said Margaret.

“My grandparents were big Labour supporters so it was a big victory for them that their family were able to get free healthcare.

“Before the NHS most people gave birth at home if they could because they wouldn’t have to pay.

“Although some mothers would have complications so they had no choice but to pay for the extra care.

“I’m told I stayed with my mother Peggy in hospital for 10 days after I was born, which was pretty normal at the time.

“The message for my mother was that she had to spend another three weeks in bed to rest after that - all quite different to what happens now.”

Unfortunately, it wasn’t long before Margaret was taking advantage of the NHS again when she was back in hospital at the age of three with a bout of Scarlet Fever.

“Even after all these years I remember it clearly,” added Margaret, from Nantyfyllon near Maesteg. “My mother had to cut a hole in the wall so she could see me in the bed and talk to me. Children and parents weren’t able to spend time with each other in hospital like they are now.

“Things have changed since and I’ve had two daughters and three grandchildren, all with the help and thanks of the NHS.”
Becoming a mother in 1949 - memories of a New Year’s birth

When Elizabeth Doreen Thomas, now aged 83, gave birth to her son 59 years ago, there were complications and it was touch and go. Mrs Thomas, who lives in Langland, recalls New Year’s Day, 1949, when her contractions started:

“My baby was due to be born late 1948 and on 1st January, 1949 I started my contractions. My husband went to his parents’ house to phone for an ambulance. (They had a business and the only phone locally.) When the ambulance arrived the driver could not open the door so I had to sit on my husband’s lap for the journey to Fairwood Hospital.

“After a difficult birth I needed a blood transfusion. I was semi-conscious but overheard Sister Hopkins on the phone saying: ‘I can’t give her this blood – I don’t like the look of it.’ I don’t remember much of the next 24 hours but was told afterwards that the blood I received was rushed from Pembrokeshire via a motorcycle.

“In the meantime the police had been alerted to contact my husband who eventually located him in my mother’s with our daughter having Sunday lunch. They drove to Fairwood like the clappers with blue lights flashing.

“The next few days were a blur and when the nurses eventually brought our son to me I asked how they had fed him. The nurse said: ‘Don’t worry, we’ve got a goat tethered by the front gate.’

“I did not put a foot to the floor for 14 days when I vacated the bed for a new patient. Before I left, Sister Hopkins, with her back to the fireplace said: ‘I don’t want to see you in here again.’ (But she didn’t tell me how to avoid it!)

“I am 83-years-old and my son, 59. I owe my life to Dr Ellis, now deceased, and the nurses in the photograph below, which they gave me when I left.”
When Alice Harris was diagnosed with a cancerous lump on her knee nearly 50 years ago, the treatment at Morriston Hospital was drastic. Nearly a quarter of her body was amputated, leading to her needing a prosthetic tin limb with buttons and gears to restore her mobility.

She faced a challenge which would have overwhelmed many. But the determined and plucky farmer's wife, then just 41, refused to let her disability hold her back. She carried on working on her farm, went dancing with her husband, Frank, and even passed her driving test when she was 72!

Sadly, Alice, pictured right, passed away last year, aged 92. But her family have paid a warm tribute to her, and the care she received in the early years of the NHS.

Her daughter, Ann Aimer, from Skewen, said:

“Nothing ever slowed my mother down. She lived on a farm in Cwmgors and didn’t let her disability stop her from carrying on doing all the jobs she had before as a farmer’s wife.”

Mrs Harris had a special prosthetic limb made for her fashioned from metal and attached to her body with a leather corset which laced up tightly around her. It was very heavy and she had to push a button to release her knee joint if she wanted to sit down. But she refused to let it get in her way, and she was even able to scale the steep wood staircase in the farmhouse by negotiating them side-ways.

She stood for house doing the family laundry (no washing machine then) and would even confidently balance on a chair when she was re-decorating.

Her family believe the limb was designed by the same specialist who helped the Second World War legend Douglas Bader walk again after he lost both his legs.

Her grand-daughter, Joanna Miles, said:

“I didn’t see my grandmother as disabled, it was just the way she was. We used to call her Nana Knock-Knock because her leg was made of tin. She was very open about it and didn’t try to hide anything from us. She had tremendous gumption.”

Over the years her prosthetic limb was replaced, and eventually Mrs Harris began to rely on a wheelchair to get around.

But the courageous great-grandmother of 17 had proved to all who knew and loved her that determination can overcome the greatest odds.

Granddaughter Joanna Miles and daughter, Ann Aimer, with a picture of Alice Harris, affectionately known as Nana Knock-Knock.
When Spitfires swooped overhead

Three-and-a-half days is along time in hospital when you’re just seven years old, but when Byron Grove was a patient as a little boy, he spent an astounding three-and-a-half years in hospital.

Mr Grove, now aged 73, was a patient in both Fairwood and Hill House hospitals between 1945 and 1948 – at the dawn of the NHS.

He was being treated for a hip displacement, and in those days treatment involved tying his legs to a bed, raising the bed on bricks, and letting gravity take its course. Mr Grove, who lives in Manselton, Swansea, recalled:

“My mother took me to the doctors because I was lame on my left side, and he decided I needed to go to hospital as an orthopaedic patient. I remember being taken in an ambulance which was all-blue. It belonged to Hill House, the hospital I was taken to, and it was used to collect their patients.

“I was put in a single room and in the room next to me was an iron lung. It was a big box which looked like a coffin and as it worked the lungs on the patient inside it, it made a terrible noise. I was in a bed which was up on blocks and my ankles tied to the foot of the bed. It was an early form of traction.”

After a short while Mr Grove was transferred to Fairwood Hospital, where he spent most of his three-and-a-half years. This time he was on a general ward, where there were patients of all ages. He was put into a special frame, made up of iron bars across his chest to stop him falling out, and leather straps which also held him securely.

“I was like that for 12 months. I was in plaster from my ankles to my thighs with a broom stick holding my legs apart.”

On sunny days the patients were wheeled outside in their beds, where RAF pilots, still stationed at nearby Fairwood aerodrome after the War, swooped overhead in Spitfires, startling the young Byron.

But days were long when they were on the ward, and the youngsters among the patients made their own entertainment. Knotted bandages served as cricket balls and newspapers were fashioned into bats, and the “balls” hit from one bed to another.

Perhaps the hardest part for the young Mr Grove was long years separated from his family. Fairwood was an isolation hospital and there were patients there suffering from infectious diseases like diphtheria and scarlet fever.

“Every visitor had to stand outside the window, they weren’t allowed inside,” he recalled. “We couldn’t have any physical contact with each other. I had to talk to my family through the window - not even my parents could come in and see me.”

But despite the years of forced inactivity, Mr Grove said he had nothing but affectionate memories for his time in hospital.

“They were lovely cottage hospitals and I made some good friends during my time there,” he said.
It’s good to talk …!

It certainly is good to talk, but it was much more difficult to do if you were a child in hospital in the early days of the NHS.

The emotional problems of sick children in hospital were not fully understood on children’s wards across the UK. It’s well documented that staff might only allow parental visits for a limited time, and would discourage telephone enquiries. Mr Grove’s story on the previous page vividly illustrates how as a boy he was kept physically apart from his family for years. Even though infection risk was the reason they were separated, it’s inconceivable a similar situation would be allowed to carry on today.

The great distress caused by the ‘no visiting’ policy of the past would never be more evident than when the infant forgot the mother and clung to the nurse when the time for discharge came, to the distress of all three.

Even as recently as the 1970s Morriston Hospital had a ruling that children under 12 were not allowed on its then maternity ward, forcing older siblings to see the new baby for the first time through an outside window.

All a far cry from the games, toys, computers and even visits from entertainers and celebrities that are normal service today.

One man who fought for change was Singleton Hospital throat surgeon, Mr Julian Bihari. Mr Bihari, who started work in the NHS in 1948 in London before moving to Swansea in 1958, said:

“It wasn’t right that children were isolated from family in that way.

“The matron’s were all-powerful in those days and I had to argue and keep putting my views across. Thankfully, the changes were made, such a difference to the situation today.

“That’s not the only major difference. For my own profession, technology has certainly changed the way we treat patients.

“For example, keyhole surgery has made such a positive difference to the way we treat patients.”

Rugby stars and a special mascot from The Scarlets pay a visit to a young patient in December, 2007. Today hospital staff encourage visitors to help youngsters stay be as pleasant as possible.
Washing with a bowl and jug

Keith Mollet, aged 66 from Killay, a retired British Telecomm engineer, recalls his time in hospital as a child in the 1950s:

“It was 1952. I was a 10 years old and it was Easter when I had a bad stomach, and it turned out it was my appendix.

“I went into Griffith Thomas ward at the old Swansea General Hospital – it was a men’s ward, I don't know if they had a children’s ward as such.

“I remember vividly the large bowl and jug which was passed around at 6.30 am every morning for us to have a wash, and the huge kettle and mugs of tea we were given.

“I remember being taken up for my operation and told I was going to theatre. I asked what I was going to see … and I was told I would see some very bright lights and to count backwards. The next thing I knew I was waking up in bed.

“I was in hospital for 10 days, and in the bed next to me was an old man named Mr Bidder. He used to let me borrow his wheelchair so I could go for a ride.

“Only one visitor at a time was allowed in to see us, and after they had gone, at 7.30 or 8pm, matron came around and put the lights out.

“I remember seeing the nurses in their camel-coloured cloaks looking very smart.

“It was the only time I've every been in hospital in my life.”

Swansea General and Eye Hospital, in St Helen’s Road, pictured in its hey day.
Memories of the Workhouse…..

By Dr Ed Wilkins - Consultant Physician, Princess of Wales Hospital Bridgend

With the inception of the NHS in July 1948 the health services and associated infrastructures were taken over by the State.

These buildings reflected the endeavours of the local community to provide health care for its population and their origins date back to Poor Law Legislation at the end of the 18th century. The Act originally referred to the care or rather the containment of Vagrants and those who where extremely poor and homeless.

The Act was underpinned by a somewhat punitive ‘let’s accommodate them but make sure that they work’. This lead to the development of the ‘Workhouse’ providing accommodation for the homeless - males and females were kept separate whether married or not - and tramps were incarcerated in cells and made to carry our tasks such as bone crushing or making hemp ropes before they were released and encouraged to move on. This was usually to the next workhouse - strategically placed within a days walking distance - usually 25 miles.

As a consequence of the legislation, Workhouse Masters and Matrons took this part of the Act to heart the institutions became cruel as epitomised in the novel by Charles Dickens. The novel and subsequent public outcry led to further legislation to provide care for the frail and infirm and there emerged the concept of the Workhouse infirmary.

In Bridgend, the Workhouse [built in 1834] became a key part of the NHS estate and remarkably played a key role in the provision of care until the mid 1980s - providing wards mainly for the elderly.

Garw ward was located in the female section of the Workhouse with St David’s and Glanogwr Wards part of the original infirmary. Administration was located in what were probably the Masters house and the men’s section. The Biochemical Laboratory was originally located in the Tramp ward cubicles!

(pictured left, the old Workhouse which became of part of Bridgend General Hospital)

Although much of Bridgend General including the newer section built later in the 19th Century is now gone - thanks to CADW the Workhouse building is visible with the Tramp Ward running along Quarella road as you come off the Tesco Bridge. Likewise, the main body of the Workhouse with its male and female entrance clearly visible facing south.

I was appointed as Consultant Physician at the beginning of the 1980s. My specialty was Care of the Elderly and as such inherited the Workhouse wards with an office in the upper section which was probably the mother with infant section. There is a tendency for those advanced in their career to refer back to the ‘good old days’ but were they?
The standard of Nursing Care was very good [led by the late Marlene Herbert and Rose Roberts] but the accommodation was very poor and cramped - with the only advantage that hip fracture rate was low because inevitably any fallers fell on to the next patient’s bed! When I took up post there were 50 outlying patients - there was one physiotherapist shared with paediatrics – and over three times the number of care of the elderly beds there are at present.

Thus, in addition to inheriting the Workhouse building, the NHS of the day inherited and to an extent propagated the institutionalisation of older people, with service provision influence inappropriately by the age of patients. Even during the early 1980s patients above the age of 65 years were precluded admission to the Coronary Care Unit.

So - in the early 1980s and before - they were not really the good old days if you happened to survive into a reasonable old age and became ill. However, during my subsequent professional career I have experienced astounding changes to patient care, coupled with associated remarkable changes in the demography of old age. A survey of acute medical admission of all ages admitted under my care in the mid 1980s showed an average of admission of 68yrs - the average now has risen by a remarkable 10 years and mirrored by life expectancy. Reflecting that far greater numbers of people are living to a greater age and of equal importance the quality of life also greatly improved.

Thus from the days of the Workhouse and its infirmary the NHS now provides a remarkable and continuously improving high quality of care irrespective of wealth creed or age. Long may we continue to value this unique and precious ‘jewel in the crown’.

Pictured above, the former Bridgend General Hospital site, circa 1990. Most of it has been demolished and houses have now been built on the site. Above, a water colour of the old Workhouse.
For one pharmacy dispenser in Tredegar in 1948, the thanks being aimed at Aneurin Bevan weren’t just limited to his success in developing new health service.

Barbara Phillips, aged 89, who now lives in Brackla, Bridgend, was just months into her new career when she decided she needed help from the top.

“I was told that I was entitled to some financial benefits from my time as a student, but when I went to try and claim it the benefits office weren’t very helpful,” said Barbara.

“I wrote a letter to Aneurin Bevan asking for his help. To my shock, within days I had received the money – he certainly managed to sort it out in extra quick time.”

One of her regrets is that she wasn’t able to say ‘thank you’ when Mr Bevan visited Tredegar to open the town’s new health centre – one of the first NHS buildings to be opened in 1948.

“It was a really busy health centre, a converted cinema I think it was. We had six doctors and the waiting room was a big hall.

“I must say that it was quite well run and I really enjoyed my time working there. I think I would have stayed there for my career but I married another pharmacist and he bought a business in Cardiff and I left after about a year.

“Still, I continued to be a pharmacist and we bought a businesses in Abercynon and Somerset before coming back to Wales to retire.”

Pharmacy had already played a big part in Barbara’s life as her father was a renowned pharmacist in Ebbw Vale.

So, after completing her training in Cardiff, it was an NHS start for the young dispenser.

“Things were a lot different in those days,” Barbara added.

“We made our own pills and mixtures back then and it was something we were trained to do. Everything was made up individually and I remember it was always packed in a special white paper.

“As time has past there’s so many pills, medicines and products on the market, and the profession is more of a dispensing service.

“Still, I have very fond memories of my time in the NHS.”
Top marks for class of ’48

The first generation of newly-qualified National Health Service nurses at the old Neath General Hospital enjoyed a perfect 100 pass rate on 18th July, 1948, when they proudly received their certificates just two weeks after the birth of the NHS.

Among them was Anita Griffiths, (second from left, back row) now aged 86, from Margam, who had joined as a trainee towards the end of the Second World War. Mrs Griffiths, now a grandmother of four, had been called up by the Wartime Government and given a choice of nursing or working in munitions. She said:

“I had done some nursing in Newport, and when the chance came to work in Neath Hospital I took it. When I arrived a school had been turned into a hospital annexe for injured soldiers. I was there on D-Day and nursed the soldiers who were injured during that.

“I remember the soldiers were on camp beds just a foot apart, and all the soldiers’ kit was there as well. There were blackout curtains on the windows and when we opened them in the morning cockroaches came pouring out.

“When we were on the wards in the night we had to carry big lamps around, rather like miners’ lamps.”

After qualifying in 1948 she stayed at the hospital until she married in 1952 and had to leave her job because at that time married women couldn’t be full time nurses. She returned to work part-time for a while on the wards and then became a mother and took a few years off from the wards to bring up her family.

Mrs Griffiths (pictured right shortly after qualifying) recalled a typical day in an early NHS hospital like Neath General (then called West Glamorgan County Hospital):

“Coming on shift in the morning the first job was getting the steriliser boiling. Then we had to make the beds. Half the beds had been made by the night shift and the rest we had to do. We had to pull the beds out and the maid came along to give everything a good dusting.”

Her uniform was all-white, and it was changed twice a day. She wore a fresh one each morning and then went to the laundry to collect a second uniform after her 30-minute lunch break. For several years after the War ended all the staff and patients were still on rations, and individual portions stored in jars and stored safely away, in case they “went for a walk.”

Mrs Griffiths, who was Rowlands before she married William, lived in nurses quarters and earned the princely sum of £50 a year.

“Out of that we had to pay for black shoes and stockings and buy our own books to study.”
As well as becoming a qualified nurse in 1948, she was one of the NHS first patients, having her appendix out in September of that year.

“I was taken off nights for a while then so I could recover,” she recalled.

Left, Mrs Griffiths with Sister Hettie Jenkins and Gwen Hodge, outside outpatients in Neath General in 1948.

Below, the official opening of the Pathology Laboratory at Neath General in the early 1950s. Mrs Griffiths, in glasses, and by now a Sister, with Sister Walters (maternity); Sister Welch; Sister Mari Thomas (Premature Baby Unit) and Home Sister Nancy Davies Hemmings. The Sisters were tasked with serving refreshments to the VIP guests.

Mrs Griffiths said that although it was very hard, she also had lots of fun, and every Christmas a concert was arranged over three nights and she always took part, singing and dancing.

“The first evening was for staff, the second for visitors and and the third we could invite out family and friends.” she recalled.

After her break to have her family, she then joined Port Talbot Hospital in 1964 for a wage of £5 a week, and worked there until her retirement in 1982. Even then she continued to care for patients by taking on a new job as an Ambulance Nurse Escort until finally finishing work for good in 1992, aged 70.

Left, Mrs Griffiths today, pictured in her home at Margam.

Below, the nursing badge she acquired on qualifying in July, 1948.
When Matron was a surrogate mum to her charges

In 1953 Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay climbed Everest; sugar rationing ended; the Queen was crowned, and student nurse Jean Minchella, began a long career in the old Neath General Hospital.

She had started nursing in St Alban’s but for personal reasons returned to Wales, aged 19, after sitting her preliminary exams. After being placed on waiting lists for the old Swansea General Hospital, Morriston Hospital and Neath General, a student nursing place became vacant at Neath and she jumped at it.

Miss Minchella recalled:

“In those days student nurses lived in, and we did bond and become good friends because we lived together.

“You didn’t come of age in those days until you were 21, so we were all under the care of the Matron. She was like a surrogate mother to us really. Looking back she was very strict, but she was also fair.

“We worked long hours, and I know youngsters today think they work very hard too, but I don’t think they work any harder than we did, they just work in a different way.

Living in the nurses’ home was very much like a nice bed and breakfast. It wasn’t a five star hotel, but we were comfortable.

“We had to share two to a room, and the cost of board and lodge was covered.

“As a student nurse I was paid £6.18s a month and out of that I had to pay for transport, entertainment and clothes.

“My parents were working class and while they were very good to me, I couldn’t go to them to ask for every this and that.

“But we were as daft then as students are today. I once spend £6 – a month’s pay – on a dress because I loved it.

“Living in we had security and plenty of food. We had a cooked breakfast every day which we had to eat.
“We were logged in for every meal with a register. I don’t think that was a bad thing, especially when young girls can be silly around food and diet. We were working nine hours a day with one day off a week, so we needed our food.”

Miss Minchella recalled how Matron kept strict curfews for her charges, with first year students to be home by 9.30pm, second years by 10pm and third years by 10.30pm.

But that didn’t stop her or her friends staying out later and climbing back through a window.

“One of the girls, who was staying in, would unlock a downstairs window for us. There was a night cook, Olive, whose job was also to ensure we were in on time. If the girl forgot to unlock the window you had to knock on the kitchen window and ask Olive to let you in.

“If she liked you she didn’t report you, so no-one gave any lip to Olive. Sometimes, if there had been chips for dinner, she’d even let you have a plate when you came home, hungry after an evening out.”

Both Matron and the Assistant Matron had flats in the Nurses’ Home, so climbing through the window late at night had to be done quietly.

“Only once did I get caught. I was creeping around the corridor and there was the Assistant Matron, very tall, in her curlers and dressing gown. She glared at me and said she would see me in her office at 9am. She absolutely floored me and I wasn’t allowed out for a month.

“Of course, we thought we were the first to climb through windows at night, but as I went up through the ranks I realised that everyone had done it as students – including the Assistant Matron!”

Miss Minchella remembered a small grocery shop near the bottom of the hospital’s drive, owned by Ernie Smart. In those days none of the student nurses had bank accounts, but Mr Smart would kindly cash their pay cheques every month.

She also recalled a favourite haunt, the Grandison pub, where the landlord would sell them two pints of bitter, two lemonades – shared across six glasses - when the girls had to pool what was left of their money before pay day and it was all they could afford for a night out.

“We’d go into the back room and sometimes ex-patients would recognise us and buy a round of drinks. It was naughty, but very nice. We had a lot of fun.”
How would you feel if you had to live at hospital as well as work in it? Back in the 1940s, living at Cefn Coed Hospital in Swansea was just another part of the job for a team of around 15 catering staff, as Hilary O’Sullivan found out.

“I’m not really sure why we had to live-in – maybe it was something to do with just coming out of wartime,” said Mrs O’Sullivan, now aged 77.

She was aged just 15 when she became a mess room maid at the hospital on 20th October 1946 – even before the start of the NHS.

“I lived-in for about four or five years and it was a really enjoyable time,” added Mrs O’Sullivan, who now lives in the Portmead area of Swansea.

“Back then there was around 700 patients to cook for, as well as the staff. We used to have these large ovens and the food we cooked was really good quality. Breakfast could include porridge, fried eggs and bacon, and we had these big steamers for kippers. For lunch we’d make a treat once-a-week of fish and chips.

“We had a baker and a butcher at the hospital so we had fresh bread and meat. I met my future husband there, he was the butcher. We’d put the food and trolleys and in the early days the patients would come down and take them to the wards. We worked hard and we had one day off a week.”

Rising up the ranks to become a head chef until she left in 1964 to run the Globe Inn in Glais, Hilary can recall one major difference to the hospitals of today. She said:

“Every so often the patients would give the hospital a big clean. You’d see some of them in the corridors on their hands and knees. To be fair, the place was spotless. The staff and patients also had an annual sports day up on the green. We’d have egg and spoon races and stalls, all the traditional stuff. I’ve got some really good memories, it was an enjoyable time.”

Pictured right: Cefn Coed cook and colleagues. Hilary O’Sullivan is top row, second from left. She’s pictured with kitchen staff and cleaners.

Far right: Hilary at the Cefn Coed party to celebrate the Queen’s Coronation in 1953.
A sea-change in Mental Health Services

Sixty years ago over half the NHS hospital beds were designated for mental health services, with thousands of psychiatric patients often living in huge institutions for years or even decades on end.

At one time Swansea’s Cefn Coed Hospital looked after 700 patients (now it has 45 long-stay beds), and there were three huge mental health institutions in the Bridgend area alone: Penyfai; Parc (now a prison) and Glanrhyd.

Glanrhyd opened in 1864 as the Glamorgan County Asylum and was renamed Glanrhyd in 1948 when the NHS was launched. Parc opened in 1887 and was originally named Parc Gwyllt. In 1934 Penyfai was opened. All three then came under the wing of Morgannwg Hospital Board in 1948.

Swansea’s Cefn Coed Hospital opened in 1932.

As recently as 1979, the three Bridgend psychiatric hospitals still had over 1,400 beds between them.

Dr Tegwyn Williams, the Trust’s Clinical Director for Mental Health Services, said:

“The biggest change has been from the late 1950s and early 1960s away from these institutions and towards community care, integrating the care of the mentally ill with the care of the physically ill.

“When the NHS began there were very few treatments for people with mental health problems, so they came into a psychiatric hospital and were there for years. In the 1950s the first pharmaceutical treatments for mental illness began to be developed, which led to patients recovering and being able to leave hospital.

“The launch of these effective treatments began the steady move towards community-based services which is continuing today.”

Dr Williams said that not all the patients who were admitted to the old institutions were mentally ill at all. Some were women or girls who had become pregnant, or people who had misbehaved in some way. Tragically, a few of these patients ended up spending upwards of 70 years in hospital, even though they had nothing wrong with them. In some cases these long term ‘patients’ did not want to leave, as they hospital had become their home.

“These institutions were like small communities, often with farms of their own,” he said.

“They were called asylums, but in those days the word meant a place where people would go for protection against the stresses and strains of life. The word had a different meaning to what it has today.”

Left: Cefn Coed Hospital cricket team.
Morriston Hospital was built, at a cost of £180,000 during the Second World War in 1942, so it was still quite new when the NHS was founded six years later.

It was a wartime hospital but run by Swansea Council, not the war Office, and while it dealt with 3,400 patients in its first year, many of them soldiers, by 1950 the numbers of patients had jumped to 43,000, reflecting the much higher proportion of local patients coming onto its wards.

Wales’s first neurosurgery unit opened there in 1946, two years before the dawn of the NHS, and in 1947 its maternity unit opened, followed in 1956 by the School of Radiology. The hospital by now was firmly part of the community.

Despite its grim beginnings, dealing with terribly injured war casualties—5,000 alone between 1944 and 1945 - staff at Morriston Hospital did all they could to bring light and cheer to the wards. A tradition of an annual carnival began, which endured for decades. Regular concerts were also held with big names like Glenn Miller; Arthur Askey; Joe Loss and Swansea’s own Harry Secombe. And staff were not averse to putting on concerts of their own as well.

Left, the Morriston Carnival Queen and attendants visit Ward 8, in 1951. Right, a carnival float in the early 1980s.

Left, Children’s Christmas party, circa 1954. Below, staff Christmas festivities in the late 1940s. (Courtesy of Morriston Hospital, the Early Years, by Dewi Glannant Williams.)
Expecting Mrs Jones?... let’s try the mouse test

Pathology has long been a key part of hospital life, even though the service is often unseen by most of the patients who benefit from it.

But according to Roy Nelson from Ty Coch, retired Head of the Medical Laboratory Scientific Office at Singleton Hospital in Swansea, the science behind this vital service has come on leaps and bounds over the years.

Mr Nelson, aged 70, started in the NHS in 1955 as a Student Technician in the old Swansea General Hospital, and rose up through the ranks before retiring in 2000.

“In those days it took on average half an hour to do a test, and now 300 can be completed in that time,” he said.

“Pathology until recently has been seen as a bit of a backroom service. But of course doctors often can’t make a decision until they get the results of pathology tests.

“When I started we used to do all the public health work, testing things like milk and water. If there had been an outbreak of food poisoning at wedding, all the food would come to us for testing. Then the public health laboratory came into being in Cockett in the late 50s or early 60s, and the work went there instead.”

He said one of the biggest differences over the years was the incredible advances in the ways tests are carried out. Today, for example, a woman can tell in seconds if she is expecting a baby by using a simple test bought in a pharmacy. Back in the 1950s, however, it was a different story.

He recalled:

“Pregnancy tests then involved four virgin white mice. We first needed to prepare, over 24 hours, a sample of urine from the lady to concentrate the hormones in it. Then we would inject the urine into the mice.

“We would wait five days and then check for changes in the mice to see whether or not the urine had contained pregnancy hormones. Sometimes the changes were so small that we had to use a magnifying glass to see them.”
Boiling up equipment

Today, sterilising medical equipment is a high tech operation where trained staff are gowned and masked, working in a sterile environment, and using specialist cleaning equipment.

But back in 1954, when Max Cadmore joined the NHS, practices were very different.

He started his career as a nurse in Morriston, rising to become the Head of the Central Sterile Supply Department in Singleton Hospital before he retired in 1996. By that time routine equipment like catheters and syringes were all thrown away after a single use. His department’s work centred on sterilising the stainless steel and titanium operating theatre instruments from Singleton and Morriston hospitals. And since then Morriston has also opened its own Sterilising Unit and there is also one in the Princess of Wales Hospital in Bridgend.

However in the 1950s, keeping equipment clean was a much more low-key affair. Catheters and syringes were re-used time and time again, simply boiled for a few minutes by individual hospital departments before being re-used on another patient. Dressings were sterilised by porters using hot steam. Mr Cadmore said:

“Things have certainly changed over the years and certainly boiling equipment would not be acceptable today. Nurses never wore gloves then because there weren’t any available, but they learned to wash their hands very thoroughly.

“In the early days patients were very well fed, having a cooked breakfast, then a cooked lunch and a cooked dinner. There were only two antibiotics available then, and we still had TB wards in the hospital. Dressings were made by nurses on the ward from rolls of gauze.”

Another big change has been getting patients up and about as quickly as possible following surgery. In the 1950s a big operation meant three weeks’ bed rest, but today patients are usually encouraged to take a few steps the next day to help them get mobile.

“Anaesthetics have also greatly improved. In may day patients were usually still unconscious when they went back to the ward, but now most begin to wake up following their operation while they are still in theatre.”

A ward in Morriston Hospital in 1953/54
Paula Wilson was a junior physiotherapist in the former Bridgend General Hospital and soon-to-be-mum to a second daughter in 1983 when she was asked to test out a high tech new device designed to treat pain.

Transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (‘TENS’) is a common place method for controlling labour pain today, but 25 years ago it was a brand new idea.

Paula, now a Paediatric Physiotherapist in the Princess of Wales Hospital, was the first pregnant woman in Bridgend to try out the device in the hours leading up to the birth of her new baby.

She recalled:

“TENS had been used at Bridgend General for a while for pain relief for patients with backache, when I was pregnant with my second one. Margaret Williams, who was then Head of Physiotherapy, suggested I gave it a go to see if it would relieve labour pains as well.

“I was happy to try it out, and I was impressed with the results. When I had my first daughter I had needed pethidine for pain relief. But with my second I just used the TENS machine and had some gas and air at the end. From the baby’s perspective it was much better.

“The nurses at the time were quite intrigued by TENS. But now it is very commonplace and used by many mothers-to-be in labour.”

*TENS is a small electrical device delivers electrical impulses across the skin. The device is usually about the size of a personal stereo. It’s connected by wires to sticky pad electrodes, which are placed on the skin in the area of the pain. This allows a small, low-intensity electric charge to be passed across the area. It is thought to work by selectively stimulating certain ‘non-pain’ nerve fibres to send signals to the brain that block other nerve signals carrying pain messages, and also by stimulating the production of endorphins, natural pain-relieving hormones.

Pictured below, part of the old Bridgend General Hospital in the early 1980s.
Paul Barrett, Chief Operating Department Practitioner in the ABM University NHS Trust’s East Division recalls the changes he’s witnessed over the past 42 years:

“I started in the Health Service in June 1966 at Landsdown Hospital. I have had unbroken service (apart from an interruption of the first Gulf War). I first moved to this area in 1968 when I started in Neath General, then moved to Bridgend General in 1969. In 1972 I started duties at the brand new University Hospital of Wales... The Heath. I returned later that year.

In 1969 Bro Morgannwg Hospital Management Committee (pictured below) managed all hospitals from Neath to Bridgend. At the time Neath was the hub hospital and Bridgend was the smaller of the two acute hospitals. 1974 saw the introductions of Health Authorities, Bridgend being swallowed up by Mid Glamorgan Health Authority which had Prince Charles in the North, Bridgend to the West, Caerphilly to the east with East Glam in the centre.

The great break up came in 1994 with the introduction of Trusts and for a short while we were a small(ish) acute trust, Bridgend and District NHS Trust. After just 5 years... full circle Bro Morgannwg NHS Trust. And now after 9 years, ABM University NHS Trust came into being on 1st April.

When I started in theatres in 1967 in Bridgend General Hospital, the consultant surgeon’s daily list had three major cases, two medium cases and a minor case, and he was finished by 12.45. Today, just one major operation like the resection of a large bowel takes five hours. Operations like these are slower because they are more invasive and more care is taken. And anaesthetics are completely different. They are designed to give pain relief afterwards.

“Back then there was little consideration about pain management. Patients would go back to the ward in real pain. There were also fewer specialty nurses. There were fewer theatres then, but more work was done. However, the quality of the work wasn’t like it is now.”

Below, Bro Morgannwg Hospital Management Committee in 1970 outside Hensol Hospital.
He continued:

“Today a patient undergoing major surgery will go to the recovery room afterwards and then into intensive care. Then there were one nurse to three patients, now it’s one-to-one, and anaesthetists do far more for post-operative pain. Patients are carefully monitored now. Back then these were just stories we heard from America.”

Mr Barrett’s role in the 1960s was assisting the anaesthetist, carrying out tasks including preparing drugs, assisting when the anaesthetics were administered, and positioning the patient for the surgeon.

The role is similar today, but set within a much more sophisticated environment. He said that 40 years ago the anaesthetist largely relied on his own eyes and basic monitoring techniques like blood pressure checks to assess how the patient was doing on the operating table.

“If we carry out a major case today we’ll put a sensor into an artery to measure the arterial blood pressure with each beat, and we’ll also use an ECG to monitor the patient’s heart. We check levels of oxygen in the blood and CO2 levels.

“The anaesthetics machine self-diagnoses to make sure it’s safe to give the anaesthetic to the patient. It’s a sophisticated system that has evolved over time.

“In the 1960s the anaesthetic machine was just a matter of gas connectors and reducing valves. Now they have two or three computers.”

Below: A watercolour of the former Bridgend General Hospital, painted by Mr D. Chambers.
Just a spoonful…of the Past, Present and Future

Some thoughts and views from the Trust’s Medical Director, Dr Bruce Ferguson.

Healthcare is in the blood of the Trust’s Medical Director, Dr Bruce Ferguson. His father was a GP and his mother a nurse – inspiring him to follow a career in the NHS.

Dr Ferguson, originally from Plymouth, went to a London medical school (St Bartholomew’s) at a time when many of his trainers had been schooled in healthcare before the NHS came into being.

“It was a different mindset,” he said. “Now, medical staff feel they’re employed and part of the NHS rather than just visiting!”

“Of course, that’s just one of many changes that have taken place over the years.

“Since I’ve been involved in healthcare, variation in the standard of care has reduced and quality has improved. There has been the recognition that some aspects of treatment need to be centralised to ensure that patients receive the highest standards of care but also the recognition that what can safely be delivered locally should be, which has taken some aspects of care out of the hospital and into the patient’s home.

“I feel I started work in a health service in the seventies where it was acceptable to deliver ‘local care as safe as possible’ within small hospitals. Now I am proud to be working in a system where, through co-operation of clinicians and hospitals, we are now providing ‘safe care as local as possible.’

“Many other things have changed. If you take a hernia operation for example, some years ago it was common practice for the patient to spend a week in hospital. Now the procedure can be done as a day case under local anaesthesia.

“Certain specialities have also grown with the NHS, such as my own speciality of critical care. When I first came to Wales from East Anglia I was amazed at how rare it was to see a normal chest X-ray with middle aged men coming to theatre – this of course was the legacy of mining and heavy industry. It has been the privilege of my generation of doctors to look after these amazing people.

Perhaps one of the stranger aspects of days gone by, which many patients might not have realised, is the way that hospitals were built.

“The hospital I trained in was built and designed around the needs and wishes of the doctors not patients. That wouldn’t happen now, and rightly so. The needs of the patient must come first so that care can be provided in the most efficient and effective way possible.”
The first Medical Director for ABM University NHS Trust first moved to Wales in 1982 and took up a role at Bridgend’s Princess of Wales hospital in 1988, becoming Medical Director for the former Bro Morgannwg NHS Trust in 2002.

But, as 60th anniversary year also marks the birth of the ABM 'super-trust', what’s the thoughts and hopes for the future?

“The links with the University are certainly very exciting and offer opportunities that will bring significant patient benefits. The larger Trust will have better sub-specialisation and we'll offer even better quality services as we move forward. Because of our scale, continuous improvement will be important. Good practice can, and should, be duplicated.

“However, one of the biggest challenges will be to create a new culture of patient centred service that’s embraced by all the many thousands of our members of staff.

“While the NHS was brought into being with a set of values that remain to this day, the way the NHS works in Wales is radically different to what you find in England. In Wales we have a politically-led model that’s underpinned by the Welsh Assembly Government’s ‘One Wales’ document. A strategically planned and all-encompassing service, rather than the commissioning body route that’s been adopted over the border.

“Importantly, we still work to the ideal of treating patients and not their financial status. Despite of all the challenges in the NHS in Wales, up to the point of availability of resource we still treat people according to their needs.

“I did some travelling in America and saw first-hand how patients often had to figure out what they could afford before receiving their treatment.

“Working in this profession it’s the patients that matter and, despite my managerial role, I continue to value the patient contact I get through working as an anaesthetist in day surgery.”

### Five quick facts about ABM University NHS Trust

- ABM University NHS Trust was formed on 1st April, 2008 following the merger of the former Swansea and Bro Morgannwg NHS Trusts.
- It is the largest hospital trust on Wales and one of the largest in the UK. It covers a population of around 600,000 people and employs about 16,000. It has an annual budget of approx. £770 million.
- The Trust has four major hospital, Morriston and Singleton in Swansea, the Princess of Wales in Bridgend and Neath Port Talbot in Baglan. It also has 14 community hospitals, clinics and treatment centres with in-patient beds, and 46 community clinics and health centres.
- A comprehensive range of services are offered, including specialist cardiac, neurosurgery and renal. It also offers mental health services. Morriston Hospital is home to the Welsh Centre for Burns and Plastic Surgery.
- It deals with 110,000 in-patients a year who arrive for planned operations or emergency, unscheduled care. Around 220,000 patients a year attend A&E, casualty and local accident centres.

### Five quick facts about the NHS in Wales

- The NHS annual budget now stands at more than £5 billion – almost double the 1999/2000 figure. Investment in new hospitals and equipment alone now stands at £315 million.
- There’s been a 33 per cent increase in the numbers of people employed by the NHS since 1997. Around 90,000 people now work in the NHS – around one in every 15 people in employment in Wales.
- This includes 50,000 nurses, midwives and health visitors – with almost one in every two NHS staff belonging in this sector. Recruitment of student nurses is the best in the UK and the number of doctors and dentists has more than doubled.
- Patients in Wales come into contact with the NHS some 22 million times each year, with 8 out of 10 contacts taking place outside of a hospital.
- Every year, NHS Wales undertakes more than 700,000 first out-patient appointments, more than 600,000 inpatient treatments and day-cases, more than a million people are seen in A&E, almost 54 million items are prescribed, and there are more than 655,000 eye tests carried out.
Across the years .... staff recall .... an informal collection of memories from today’s health workers

“Although I have only worked at Morriston for 17 years, being a local girl, this is where I was born, spent time for various ailments as a child, visited many relations who were ill, and where my father died.

My earliest memories are of a nurse singing a Harry Belafonte song to me when I was poorly with acute appendicitis aged 6. I remember her to this day, she had auburn hair and freckles and I thought she was wonderful.

Matron ruled the ward, which was run like a military operation. The Morriston site was very small then, just one corridor really. I am now 60 years old and have seen the site grow larger over the years and applaud the exciting changes and advances that this Trust has achieved.”

“I have grown up with Morriston Hospital and surrounding countryside as a playground since I was a child. I have worked here myself for the past 24 years and my mother before me.

I remember playing tennis and football as a child in the grounds behind the nurses home and gathering conkers and chestnuts on cold frosty autumn mornings.”

“I joined the health service straight from school in March 1975 working in the secretary's office at Mount Pleasant Hospital. We didn't have computers, just manual typewriters where we used carbon paper to make extra copies. We then progressed to electric typewriters and thought we had entered “the technological age”. Such a thing as a fax machine didn't exist. We thought we were really well off when we were given a brand new Rank Xerox Duplicator!! We actually managed extremely well without email, etc.

The main site for all personnel, finance, etc., was 137/138 St Helen's Road and everything run very smoothly from there, there were no other "Big Chiefs", scattered around and everyone knew who was in charge of what department without any difficulty, there was no being passed from "pillar to post".

Mount Pleasant Hospital was a lovely place to work, I have fond memories. There were the likes of the late Selwyn Williams, Bryn Colcannon and Cliff Dark, who were always keen to reminisce their stories/tales of their time whilst working there over the years and they also used to keep us amused with their tales of the hospital when it was known as the local "workhouse"!

Even though Mount Pleasant was very old, it was a happy place to work, everyone new one another and had time and courtesy to pass the time of day with each other, there was no real "grumpiness" with the staff as you find today. It was such a loss to close such a good hospital.”

“I was born here September 1948 and my middle name is Vivienne - I was named after two doctors who attended to my mother at the time of my birth.”— Rita Vaughan.
"I too have worked in both Morriston and Singleton Hospitals since 1980. I lived in the Nursing home (top corridor) at Morriston and there were no electrical points in the rooms. Thank God for battery operated record players!

My grandfather actually came down from the valleys to help build the hospital. Times have changed."

"Mount Pleasant Hospital was a great place to work. My mother was a nurse there for many years. I particularly remember Xmas times when they would put on concerts which would have everyone in hysterics and how they would do their best to cheer up the patients by decorating the wards with special Xmas scenery.

She would take my sister and I up there to say hello to everyone and I remember visiting the office near the cobbled slope at the front entrance. I remember going with my father to collect her from work and she’d come along wearing her nurses uniform with the cap and cape and I’d feel so proud of her.

I am 40 now and my mother is still nursing in the NHS. Of course, it doesn't matter which part of the NHS you work for, everyone will have their own individual memories good and bad, but its nice to look back occasionally."

"I was a patient in the old Swansea Hospital on the Children's Ward in 1950 when I was 2 yrs old.

I believe at that time Sister Annie Jenkins was in charge, and later on I was a student nurse working on her ward, both in the old Swansea Hospital and when Singleton opened.

I also have memories of being a patient as a child in Morriston Hospital, and my mother visiting me every day, coming by bus from Mumbles.

I also worked for 3 years in Mount Pleasant on the Maternity Unit there and it was a very happy place to work. Also my children were born there, before the unit was transferred to Morriston Hospital.

For the past 18 years I have worked in both Morriston and Singleton hospitals and the changes have been unbelievable, both for the good and bad.

As has been said, it doesn't matter which part of the NHS we work in, we all have many memories, happy, sad, good and bad, but it is nice to remember and look back sometimes."

"Rose tinted glasses come to mind. I have worked in the NHS for 33 years and I remember collecting a patient from theatre unconscious with an airway in and that was as a student nurse on my first ward.

The porters had to run up hill to ward 1. I spent most of my training in a state of terror! Many of the patients who survive surgery now would not have been operated on in those days. As far as I am concerned everything has improved except morale."
Staff recall ....

“I started in the Health Service in 1973 and started in St Helens Road in the Supplies Department. It was a great time to be in the NHS as it was happy and people worked together in small teams.

I then moved up to Orchard Street with other departments and stayed there until my move to Singleton.

I have been happy here but miss the good old days when we had carnivals, pantos and good laughs together. People seemed to mix more then and really worked as teams.

The moral is so different now and I can’t say I really enjoy it like I did then.

St Helens Road offices were very old houses and the only way to get out during a fire was from a hoist on the roof !!

I also remember one day coming in after work to pick something up I had forgotten and once the front door was opened there was a carpet of cockroaches which you walked on and scrunched until they all suddenly disappeared !!

Other times you would walk down the stairs and mice would walk down by the side of you !

My time in Orchard Street was happy as again we all worked as a team and many Christmas parties I can remember fondly !!

The people working in NHS today don’t know what it was like then - much happier times.”

“I have just read the comments with regard to Mount Pleasant Hospital and was so proud and touched that they mentioned my Dad (Cliff Dark).

At one stage I believe that all members of my family were working there. On reflection it truly was a FAB place to work and we thought things weren't great then.”

“I started in the NHS in 1970 and had the good fortune to work in the Supplies Dept (under the helm of Mr Hullin, HG Davies, Mr Marshall etc).

I left in 1973 to take up the post of ante-natal clinic secretary at Mount Pleasant Hospital. The new clinic was due to be built but in the meantime we worked from the old outpatients dept.

The problem was that the maternity department (where the notes were kept in a trolley) was at the top of the cobbled slope and the Out Patients’ Department was at the bottom by the Porters Lodge.

If there was no porter available it was left to myself and Sister Thomas to take on the intrepid task of manoeuvring the trolley down the cobbled slope so that the notes were available for the afternoon clinic sessions.

When it was raining we had to hold the trolley with one hand and an umbrella in the other - talk about Health and Safety!”
Staff recall ....

“We are so much better at doing what we do now than we were then. Real miracles happen every-day. Breath taking surgery, new treatments, wonder drugs, its amazing.

Wages are much better now, its generally a safer society to live in and we all live happier, longer lives. However, I do agree about the morale thing. I think people in general are much more selfish today and out for themselves. You not only see that in work but on the roads, in supermarkets etc etc.”

“During my 35 years in the NHS I have enjoyed every day. So much so, I loathe taking a day off. Except for glamorous granny competitions.”

“I have only been working in the NHS just over 7 years but I remember being in hospital a few times through my life time. I remember having to stay in Hill House Hospital in 1962 when I was 7yrs old with pneumonia and the staff opened one window blind in our ward for me and another patient to watch the fireworks up on the hill on Guy Fawks Night.

Also I remember being in Morriston Hospital for six weeks with diabetes in 1967, when I was 12 years old and looked after by Dr Dennis Daily. I was put in an adult ladies ward because there wasn't any room in the children's ward, so I was spoiled rotten.

I remember being pregnant with my first daughter at Morriston and being able to go outside and watch the Hospital Carnival in July 1979.”

“I started working in Morriston:

The same year in which the Cultural Revolution started in China.
Before Elvis Presley married Priscilla.
The year in which the USA started their bombing campaign in Vietnam.
The same year as Man's first walk in space.
Before the world's first heart transplant '
The year it was decided that decimal coinage was to be introduced in Britain.
The year in which Malcolm X was assassinated in Harlem.
The year Canada adopted the red and white maple-leaf flag.
The month that the Beatles returned from their second tour of America.
The month before Tottenham beat Man United 5 - 1.

Since it's such a long time ago and I'm getting on a bit, can anyone help me remember what the date was?”

“When I started working for WGHA we had cricket, football, rugby, and netball teams and even a gardening club. There were regular social gatherings in the Drs’ mess and even in the gardens behind the old Sisters Quarters.

What has been lost from these sites is the close knit communities that were formed by living within the Hospital setting. Bring back the Nurses Home and all the parties.”
What’s new and for the future...

And finally, a look at what’s happening in our hospitals in 2008, and a glimpse of our plans for the future.

The new robots....

State-of-the-art automated pharmacies are now online at Morriston, Singleton, Neath Port Talbot and Princess of Wales hospitals.

The automated system consists of two medimats (robots), two fast moving line dispensers (speed boxes) and an automated loading hopper. The system includes bar code recognition so that the correct medicines are identified in the quickest possible time.

At any one time the pharmacy holds 18,000 items.

*Picture: Pharmacy Technician, Jannine Rogers, can now search thousands of items at the touch of a button.*

Healthcare is a fine art......

The arts are playing an ever increasing role at the Trust’s hospitals.

With the arts seen as having an increasingly important role in enhancing care and healing in the healthcare environment, the Trust now has an Arts in Health Group, which is working to encourage a wider interest in Arts in Health within the Trust.

*Picture: The winning picture in the Trust’s 2007 Winter photography competition.*

Remote treatment a step closer......

The Trust is set to pilot a new all-Wales Telecare project, which will see state-of-the-art health and IT equipment placed in schools, care homes, day care centres and patient homes across Swansea.

The equipment means that medical experts can provide diagnostic sessions, surgical follow-ups and tests – all through the Internet.
The equipment will initially be used with patients who use wheelchairs and have complex seating and positioning problems, as well a Pressure Ulcer Prevention Service (PUPIS).

Picture: Trainee Clinical Scientist, Lorna Tasker, demonstrating the Telecare equipment.

Help for Africa.....

Trust experts are regularly crossing continents to help improve health in Africa.

This Swansea-Gambia link is a partnership between the Trust, Swansea Medical School, the Royal Victoria Teaching Hospital, Banjul, and the School of Medicine in the The Gambia, and was established with support from Tropical Health and Education Trust (THET).

One of many trips to the country focused on podiatry and the impact of diabetes on feet. As many Gambian specialists leave the country for work abroad, the team will be assessing doctors and nurses and attempting to encourage a larger network of medical staff to be trained in relatively simple procedures that can be highly effective in preventing and treating the devastating problems of diabetic foot.

A healthier shade of green......

A commitment to cut our carbon footprint has already taken a big stride forward.

The Trust has put in place a three-year project to reduce its carbon footprint by 15% (West) by 2010, and has just successfully completed the first step towards the green target.

It’s estimated that energy saving measures could help save the Trust £78,000 per year in energy costs – a 1.5 million kWh energy reduction.

The Trust has signed up to an energy awareness and sustainability campaign known as the ‘carbon leader’ approach – a new way of tackling climate change.

Ty Olwen takes design accolade.........

Ty Olwen hospice has picked up a top prize at this year’s Swansea Lord Mayor’s Design Awards.

The hospice, which recently saw a £1.2 million refurbishment, won a commendation in the category for Best Interior (Commercial or Retail). The Trust, and architectural designers Nightingale Associates, were commended for the Ty Olwen project along with SA1’s La Parilla restaurant.

Opened in 1981, Ty Olwen underwent a major refurbishment last year to upgrade its facilities, including en-suite bathrooms and modernised ward accommodation.

Ty Olwen’s new lounge.
Theatres treat thousands more patients…..

Nearly a year after the Trust embarked on an ambitious plan to improve its operating theatres, thousands more patients through the doors have proved the project’s success.

Statistics show that, in the last year, around 2,500 extra patients have been treated at operating theatres in Swansea’s two acute hospitals, Morriston and Singleton.

Importantly, it means more people receiving surgery, patients being treated as soon as possible and not spending unnecessary time in acute beds waiting for their operation, which prevents other patients from using the beds.

£10m burns extension taking shape……..

Almost a year since work started on a £10 million extension to the Welsh Centre for Burns and Plastic Surgery, building work is taking shape and is on track to be completed by the late summer.

While the main extension facility will not be completed until August 2008, some of the new facilities in the multi-million pound project are already in place.

The physiotherapy room has been given a facelift that includes a folding wall for patient confidentiality. The occupational therapy service has been reconfigured to give staff and patients more space, and there’s also a new reception area.

Theatre staff have got new and extended changing facilities, and a larger staff room with kitchen facilities.

And the 1,600 square metre extension continues to change the shape of Morriston Hospital.

The completed project will boost facilities for children and adults receiving outpatient care and increase overall patient capacity. The Welsh Assembly Government funded expansion will also see the burns service having two fully operational burns theatres and an additional fourth plastic surgery theatre.

It will also be home to the UK’s first Burns Study Research centre, following a successful bid with Cardiff and Swansea universities to win the Healing Foundation award.

£1.2million CT Scanner project starts treating patients……..

A brand new Computed Tomography (CT) Scanner, part of a £1.2 million project, is now up and running at Singleton Hospital. The new CT Scanner will primarily help with the treatment of oncology patients – those with differing forms of cancer – and is set to help treat around 1,000 patients a year.

A CT Scanner is a sophisticated x-ray machine in which the x-ray beam rotates around the body. The beam generates x-ray images of the body which are fed into a computer and put together to give a series of cross sections or ‘slices’ through the part of the body being scanned. This builds up a detailed picture of the inside of the body.
Staff head for Afghanistan.....

Staff from ABM University NHS Trust jetted out on special mission to Afghanistan to provide essential support to our armed forces. Eleven members of the Trust’s staff formed a large part of the 65 person-strong 203 (Welsh) Field Hospital (Volunteers) providing healthcare expertise in one of the most dangerous places on Earth.

The Trust had a larger number of representatives than any other in Wales. The three-month tour of duty will be 203’s first tour, and only the fifth Territorial Army hospital squadron to travel to Afghanistan. The staff have taken unpaid leave from the Trust to carry out their duties.

£750K gamma camera starts service at Singleton....

A new £750k Gamma Camera is now up-and-running at Singleton Hospital and making big developments in patient services. After three-months of testing the near three-quarters of a million pounds piece of equipment has just completed its first full clinical week.

The double-headed Gamma Camera will be used to determine physiological changes in the body and will be vital in the diagnoses and treatment of patients. In particular, those patients who have had surgery for breast cancer, to determine any spread of cancer from one part of the body to another, for undertaking cardiac tests prior to commencing Herceptin treatment, and for precise location of active lymph nodes prior to surgery.

It will also be used to undertake kidney function tests and checking for blood clots on the lungs.

Picture: Dr Parvaiz Ali, Head of Nuclear Medicine, with the new Gamma Camera.

New pacemaker service shows heart of new Trust....

A pacemaker might only be small but a new service is set to make a huge difference to heart patients at Princess of Wales Hospital.

With the Trust only weeks old, a Pacemaker Implant Service at Bridgend has become one of the first, new positive benefits of sharing expertise across ABM University NHS Trust.

Until now, patients at the Princess of Wales Hospital in need of a pacemaker would have to be transferred to Morriston Hospital, which could often mean an inpatient wait of up to nine days.

With the procedure now being carried out at two of the Trust’s hospitals, it means that patients have shorter waiting times, they can have the procedure carried out closer to their own community and time can be released in Morriston for extra procedures.

Picture: Dr Jonathan Goodfellow (front) holding a pacemaker and (back) some of the Princess of Wales team: Ben Rees (Charge Nurse), Greg Whittle (Radiographer), Rosie Humphreys (Sister), Martine Evans (Radiographer), Ann Power-Jones (Cardiac Laboratory Manager) and Richard Lewis (Cardiac Physiologist).
Trust’s two new MRI facilities opened by minister…..

Two new state-of-the-art Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) scanners, set to benefit thousands of patients, have been officially opened.

Health Minister Edwina Hart marked the beginning of a new era in diagnosis and subsequent treatment of patients in South West Wales, particularly for cancer patients and children.

Welsh Assembly Government investment of around £4.1 million - £2.8 million at Singleton Hospital and £1.3 million at Neath Port Talbot Hospital – means that ABM University NHS Trust now has access to four MRI scanners with an annual patient capacity of around 22,000 examinations - one of the largest in the UK.

Picture: Health Minister Edwina Hart with patients and staff at Neath Port Talbot Hospital.

Major boost for young people’s specialist mental health unit plans…..

Ambitious plans for the purpose-built Child and Adolescent Mental Health Unit, serving South, Mid and West Wales, are a step closer to becoming reality.

Health and Social Services Minister Edwina Hart has approved an important stage in the scheme, the Outline Business Case, paving the way for the development at the Princess of Wales Hospital in Bridgend to hopefully be operational by 2010. The unit (artist’s impression above) will provide very specialised interventions and care for children and teenagers with mental health disorders, including young people with eating disorders like anorexia nervosa and bulimia.

It will cover a population of 2 million approx., and is expected to treat around 110 youngsters a year from 16 South and Mid Wales local authority areas.

Initial plans to improve access to Morriston Hospital approved

Plans to greatly improve the basic site infrastructure, including access roads, car parks and walkways at Morriston Hospital have been approved by the Health Minister Edwina Hart.

The proposals by Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University NHS Trust are a core enabling component of a phased major redevelopment of the Morriston Hospital site as part of plans to improve healthcare services in Swansea.

The approval of the first business case means the Trust can now progress with developing more detailed plans for funding the replacement of the 1940s buildings on the Morriston site, for consideration by the Minister.
The improvement of the site infrastructure at Morriston Hospital is a key part of the long-term plans for health services in Swansea. As other developments come through, this will reduce duplication of surgical, outpatient and diagnostic services and associated costs, which will enable more money to be channelled to frontline care for patients.

Singleton Hospital’s vital role in Swansea’s future health care provision has also been outlined in an exciting Concordat agreed between the city’s NHS Trust and Swansea University.

The hospital, which is strategically placed alongside the University and its burgeoning Medical School, is planned to provide a range of innovative services.
Acknowledgements

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Also, *Morriston Hospital, The Early Years, by Dewi Glannant Williams*