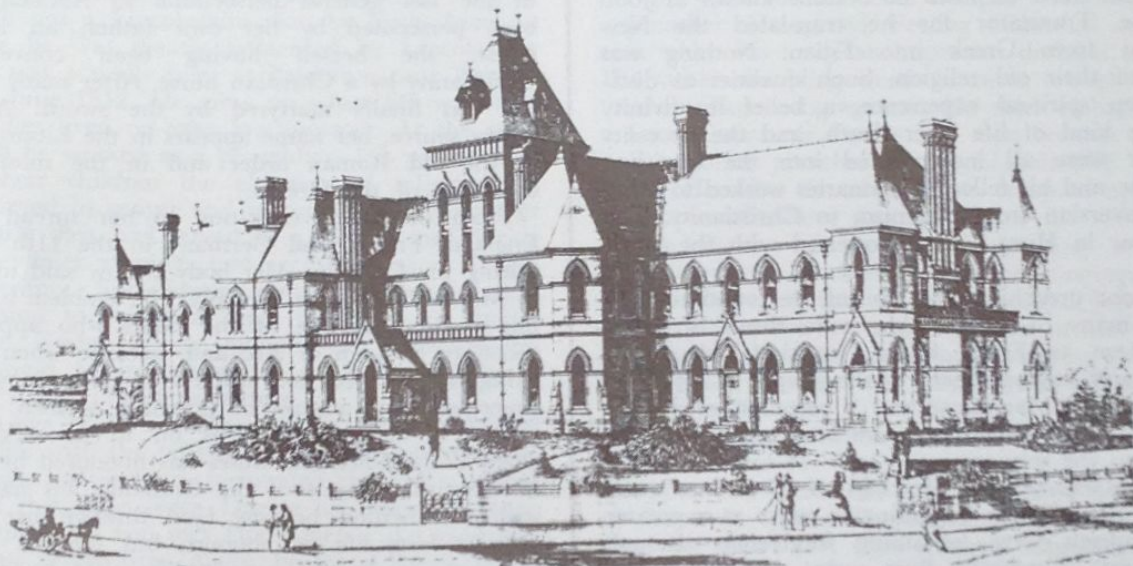


The story of the
**JOHNSON HOSPITAL
SPALDING**

by RUBY HUNT



1881 - 1981



ON Wednesday, 12th October, 1881 the townfolk of Spalding left St Peter's Church with the words "Go and do thou likewise" ringing in their ears. The occasion was the Dedication and Formal Opening by the Bishop of Lincoln, the Rt Revd Dr Christopher Wordsworth, of the Johnson Hospital, which owes its existence to the town's good samaritans, Misses Elizabeth Ann and Mary Ann Johnson.

Elizabeth Ann and her sister Mary Ann were the spinster daughters of the Revd Walter Maurice Johnson, one time Master of the Grammar School and Vicar of Weston St Mary. After their father's death in 1832, the sisters continued to live at the Master's Lodge until 1841, after which they occupied Fairfax House for many years, and tales of their munificence are legion.

In 1872 Elizabeth Ann bequeathed to her sister the bulk of her property and directed that after the death of Mary Ann the residue of the estate should be employed in building "a hospital to be, as nearly as may be deemed advisable and circumstances will admit, erected on the plan and conducted on similar principles to the Hospital and Infirmary of Stamford called the Stamford and Rutland Infirmary".

Miss Mary Ann accordingly purchased and conveyed the present site to a newly formed group of Trustees and when, on 10th March, 1878, she died at the age of 83, plans were finally agreed for the building of the Hospital.

The red brick structure, faced with Bath stone in Domestic Gothic Style, was erected at a cost of £4,000, and a further £5,000 was expended on furnishings and equipment. The first contractor, having withdrawn from negotiations, was succeeded by Messrs Bulling of Ollerton, the architect being Mr G. G. Hoskins of Darlington. Building commenced in July 1879 and was completed by October 1881 when the Dedication was held in the St Peter's Church which until 1968 stood opposite the Hospital, although it had not been used for family worship since 1914.

On this occasion every seat in the church was occupied and many stood as the Bishop conducted the service before moving across to the Hospital where he was presented with the key, met inside by the Trustees and proceeded to both North and South Wards to give a formal Blessing. The Hospital was thrown open for public viewing (admission by ticket only) and so great was the interest shown that a second Open Day was arranged so that all who wished could inspect Spalding's latest amenity.

On the Friday following the opening a violent thunderstorm occurred causing the collapse of the 19-foot chimney at the South End and damaging most of the decorative spires on the building. A few years

later, in 1895, a similar storm caused damage to the tune of £262 6s 1d.


In accordance with the wishes of the Misses Johnson the Trustees consisted of the Vicars of Spalding, Weston St Mary, Pinchbeck, Moulton, Cowbit and Deeping St Nicholas, together with six inhabitants of Spalding and the Vicar at that time of St John the Baptist—a church built by the gift of the Johnson sisters. The first President appointed was the Revd Canon Edward Moore, cousin of the Johnsons and Vicar of Spalding, and the six inhabitants chosen to augment the clerical group included members of such well-known Spalding families as Maples, Calthrop, Everard and Johnson.

The Trustees were all-powerful and formulated strict rules and regulations. They appointed all staff and met every Monday afternoon to receive reports from the Medical Staff and Matron, to decide on the admission and discharge of patients, to examine the weekly accounts and to make all necessary payments. Patients were drawn primarily from the inhabitants of Spalding, Weston, Pinchbeck, Moulton, Cowbit and Deeping St Nicholas, and were admitted only on Monday afternoons at 2 pm except in cases of emergency. People from other parishes could, under Rule 27, be admitted if room were available. Those not deriving benefit after a two-month stay were discharged unless the physician ordered otherwise, and such patients were not re-admitted within two months unless so recommended. Those discharged as cured were "enjoined by the Chairman of the weekly Board to return public thanks to Almighty God at their respective places of worship". All Church of England patients able to attend and all Church of England members of staff were instructed to worship regularly at St Peter's.

Those whose admission was excluded were children under eight years old, women advanced in pregnancy (except in extraordinary cases), persons disordered in their senses, persons subject to fits, persons with infectious diseases or consumption and those in an incurable or unrelievable state of health. The number of patients first admitted was 14—by the end of that year three had been discharged as cured, two 'relieved', seven remained in hospital and two died from their ailments. At the end of the following year 48 patients had received In Patient Treatment and a still larger number had attended the Dispensary which had moved to the Hospital from its former premises in the town.

At first people were slow to avail themselves of the services, and the Trustees Report "regretted that the inhabitants have not availed themselves nearly so generally of the Institution as it was hoped". One of the stumbling blocks seems to have been the widely held belief that religious denominations affected admission and the Trustees were at pains to point out that "persons of all denominations are received upon equal

No. 1877

 Johnson Hospital, Spalding.

Received of *J. J. Harp* *March 18th 1914*

the sum of — pounds *14* shillings *0* pence, being

1 weeks Contribution towards *his* support in

this Hospital up to *March 16th 1914.*

L' 14 0 *F. M. M. Cooke*
Matron.

JOHNSON HOSPITAL
BUILT AND ENDOWED BY FUNDS
GIVEN AND BEQUEATHED BY THE LATE
MISSES E. A. AND M. A. JOHNSON.
OPENED 12TH OCTOBER 1881.



Above: Matron P. Burgon 1963-73.

Left: Nursing Auxiliary Edith Roe.

terms" stressing that in 1883 "the number of Non-Conformists admitted has been 55 against 31 members of the Church of England".

From very early days it was obvious that the income from capital belonging to the Hospital would not cover expenditure and the Trustees relied heavily upon subscriptions and gifts from the district upon which the benefits of the Hospital were conferred. Year after year a miscellany of gifts was showered upon the Hospital. The first year's Gift List notes receipt of such diverse articles as blue serge and red flannel wraps for male and female patients respectively, flowers, knitted knee-caps, geese, turkeys, three packets of Japanese Fans (poor ventilation?), and innumerable religious tracts. Two copies of the *Lincolnshire Free Press* were donated weekly—a practice (now increased to 5) which continues to the present day.

Much of the district's social history can be traced through these lists, the first of which records the gift by the Great Northern Railway Co. of the whole of the gravel needed for the building site. In 1882 the new line between Spalding and Lincoln was opened. Engaged on this work was a large number of labourers, some of whom appeared on the Hospital's Casualty Records—the first two a railway navy 'of no fixed address' and a 'native of Northampton' with 'an injury sustained on the railway in course of formation from Spalding to Lincoln'. Close liaison between the two services led—for many years—to the appearance of the name of the Great Eastern Railway Joint Committee on the Hospital's Subscription List.

Perusal of patients' occupations pinpoints the rural nature of the area in which the Hospital was set—labourers, horse dealers, chaff cutters, hay pressers, bargemen and the occasional travelling showman and their wives all appear. And the Fenland's most widely used 19th century soporific was responsible for at least one case of laudanum poisoning. Not all the patients found the Hospital to their liking. In 1884 a "patient left the Hospital immediately after admission to fetch his clothes BUT DID NOT RETURN".

In 1893 arrangements were made with the Lincolnshire Nursing Association to provide board and lodging in the Hospital for a Jubilee Nurse in the conviction that this would prove "beneficial to the poor inhabitants of Spalding". In 1913 social progress was recorded in that a Children's Ward was started "largely due to the Medical Examination of children in Elementary Schools". During the same year, insured persons under the National Insurance Act were admitted and the new Operating Theatre which was opened and equipped at a cost of £170 was, according to the Trustees, "well worth the money". Income was augmented by Hospital Balls, Pound Days and the like, and the rent from the Littleworth Farm was very useful. Alms Boxes were placed in local establishments although the yield was often very low. In 1882 patrons of the White Hart contributed 4/-, the Red Lion 5/-, the Hole in the Wall 2/6d, Pied Calf 2/6, while the Sale of Rules at 6d per copy produced a mere 6/6d. No fund raising opportunity was overlooked—sale of dripping from the Hospital kitchen brought in several pounds a year, and from 1891-1916 a Miss Stapleton was charged 1/- annually for the use of the Hospital water pipe!

In one respect the forerunners of today's staff and patients scored over their counterparts of the '80s. The food account for 1896 lists 'Wines, Spirits and Beers' at £31 4s 10d, whereas in a 20th century account "providing a wholesome, well balanced and varied diet" the amount under Alcoholic Drinks is firmly recorded as Nil! In 1912 it took 7/8½d per week to keep each hospital inmate—today's Hospital Administrators allow £8 per head for food alone.

During the First World War the War Office utilised the Hospital and the Trustees thanked those who "so generously gave and lent beds and bedding for the use of wounded soldiers", the first of whom was a private in the 2nd Lincolnshire Regiment. British and Belgian soldiers figure in the Hospital records over the next few years and gifts poured in from the local people. A prodigious quantity of eggs was received—in 1915

Pinchbeck West and St Matthews alone contributed 1,230, together with 122 jars of jam—and other parishes were not far behind!

In 1917 the Rules and Regulations were updated—all donors of £50 became Vice-Presidents for life and Representative Governors included members from the Board of Guardians and from the Urban Councils of Spalding, Holbeach and Long Sutton together with members from Parish Councils of villages within the authorised area.

Electric light was installed in 1920, and in 1921 the Children's Ward was completed and a Ladies Linen Guild was formed. The 390 members each paid 1/- per year and contributed two articles of linen or money in lieu. This charitable Guild would have delighted Miss Johnson who, in 1822, had herself instituted the Dorcas Charity through which tickets were distributed to the poor to enable them to purchase their clothing at half the cost price. In 1925 a Lift Fund was opened and in 1927 the electric bed lift was installed.

The 1930s and 1940s saw a further increase in the use of the Hospital, and in 1948 the Johnson Hospital came under State ownership as part of the National Health Service. This brought material benefits and in the 1950s various new buildings were provided. In 1957 conversion of part of the Hospital into a Maternity Unit began and, although it was opened in 1958, shortage of staff delayed its being brought into use until September of the following year. Ten years later the Children's Ward was closed but the 8-bed Maternity Unit continues to flourish on the ground floor, above which are housed 32 beds divided between the Male and Female Wards. Since 1964 the Avalon Wards have provided 56 beds for geriatric patients. The name was adopted from that of the building formerly standing on the site which is opposite the main Hospital building. Here stood Avalon House, a large old building used as a school by Mr and Mrs Waring in the early days before being taken over for use as Spalding Tax Office.

In 1974 re-organisation of the National Health Service brought together under one Authority the community and hospital services previously administered by local authorities and the Hospital Management Committee. Today, Mr W. M. Pratt, Mid-Sector Administrator and Nursing Officer Mrs B. Croot look to the community for support previously sought by the Hospital Management Committee. In 1930, the Hospital's Golden Jubilee Year, an appeal was launched for £3,000 to provide additional facilities. In this, the Centenary Year, £60,000 is desperately needed, largely to improve Outpatient facilities. In the intervening years costs have soared—in 1908 the bill

for painting the exterior of the Hospital was £22 12s 0d, today's price is over £3,500! In 1930, 380 In-Patients and 516 Outpatients benefited from hospital treatment. During 1980, the total number of patients in hospital was 29,399 while 28,435 visited the Outpatient Department. The successful outcome of the 1930 Appeal will surely be matched in this Centenary Year which has already brought forth a wonderful response from the public.

The success of any hospital relies heavily on the dedication of its nursing staff, and in conversation with members old and new this attribute outshines all others. Some have long-standing connections with the Johnson—Sister May Massey's (1968-72) grandfather, Mr George Massey, was a Trustee who first acted as Honorary Secretary in 1918. Sister Mary Luck, now retired, first worked in the Hospital when patients had to be carried upstairs and the old wooden ward floors were given their weekly scrub. Duty doctors signalled their arrival by striking a gong in the entrance and the upstairs nursing staff learned to recognise each 'medic' by his reverberations! Sister Luck, Nurse J. Christian—who stoutly affirmed that "if you were willing to put your head down and work it was OK"—and Sister Phyllis Palmer, whose years of service extended to 1967, remember Nursing Auxiliary Edith May Roe whose nursing days in the Johnson spread over 32 years before her retirement in 1971. In 1939, as a member of the St John's Ambulance Brigade, she was required to put in a 50-hour stint on hospital work. As an only child, surrounded by five maiden aunts, picture her embarrassment on undertaking her first assignment—bed baths for the Male Ward! When a returning German pilot dropped his surplus bombs over Spalding during World War II she vividly recalls cycling lampless in the black-out, arriving at the Hospital to find Matron Ethel Foster attending to casualties, clad in her blue dressing gown, tin hat and pigtail down her back, muttering, "We're all in God's hands", while Doctor J. Cadas was in the operating area looking like a "fishmonger in a red apron".

Plans by the Area Health Authority—successfully opposed by townspeople—to remove the Hospital's distinctive top tower in 1977 reminded Miss Roe of the days when this same tower provided living quarters for probationer nurses in training at the Johnson. This was prior to 1928 when Mr Cecil Robinson of Quadring provided money for the building of a Nurses' Home.

Today the Hospital is a bright and cheerful refuge where nurses go about their tasks creating the minimum of that fuss and noise which Florence Nightingale once described as "the most cruel absence of care which can be inflicted on either sick or well".



A Day Room, Avalon Wards.



Nurses' Home.

(Photos: Les Prudden).