

SIDLAW HOSPITAL

Sidlaw Hospital was born in May, 1899 when the Lord Provost invited the citizens of Dundee to meet in the Town Hall "for the purpose of considering and devising means for the treatment and cure of consumption." For this cause, Ex Lord Provost Alexander Moncur donated £10,000, and later a further £15,000, for the "erection, equipment and purchase of the site for the institution."

On January, 1900, Lord Airlie offered the Committee of Directors a free gift of a site at Auchterhouse "measuring fully twenty-one acres and in every way suitable for the erection of a Sanatorium." Enquiries were then made as to the water supply and, on this account, the Committee were well assured by a letter from the Engineer who reported: "Assuming that provision is made for thirsty inmates, the quantity of water required will be about sixty gallons per head equal to 1,800 gallons per day."

Thus in September, 1902, the Countess of Airlie opened "The Dundee Sanatorium for Consumption." "The Society in Aid of Persons Afflicted with Consumption" was to be constituted on broad and undenominational lines, would elect its management and distribute its benefits without regard to creed, and would carefully and scrupulously protect from interference the religious belief and observances of every person resident in the Sanatorium. Included in the Rules and Bye-Laws for the management and regulation of the Sanatorium, it was decreed that patients' windows must always be opened except when dressing and undressing; male and female patients must take their walks separately; and no patient shall at any time go into a room occupied by one or more patients of the opposite sex without the express sanction of the Medical Superintendent, or Matron.

A year later, the Sanatorium was well-established, and it was concluded that "perfection having been the aim, it is admitted by experts that the Sanatorium on the Sidlaw slopes at Auchterhouse has few, if any, equals in Europe, and

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already there is strong evidence that it will effectively carry out the purpose of its foundation."

In the first Medical Report in 1904, the Medical Superintendent produced a record of the number of patients "cured", "apparent arrests" and "worse". He said : "It will be well to explain that I classify as "apparent arrest" cases those which attain to a condition of average robust health, able to walk fifteen or twenty miles without undue fatigue and without abnormal rise of temperature, with no sputum or almost none," etc. He also praised the behaviour of the patients who had "faced the hardships of winter with much patience and pluck." The Committee also announced that the name of the Institution had changed to "The Sidlaw Sanatorium".

Very soon, however, the Directors of the Sanatorium felt the lack of funds and, in an appeal to the Dundee public in order to raise funds for the continuance of the good work of the Institution, the Medical Superintendent gave an example of two patients : (a) Mrs. X of Dundee, a frail and thin 7st 3lbs, was admitted in a feeble state. After a little over three months, on discharge, she was able to eat a hearty breakfast and could walk ten to twelve miles without fatigue. (b) Mr. Z of Dundee arrived in a weak condition, hardly able to walk, at 8st 11lbs, and, after five months treatment, he was thirty-seven pounds heavier, his strength had trebled, and he could walk fifteen miles without fatigue.

However, as the deficits in the Annual Accounts continued each year, which were not always wiped out by a "generous friend", the crisis eventually came to a head in October, 1909 when it was reported that the Sanatorium was in debt to the North of Scotland and Town and County Bank to the extent of £687 16s 11d. Thus, after the situation was discussed at a Public Meeting, the Directors, "considering it unwise to continue the work of the Sanatorium under existing conditions, unanimously decided to close the Sanatorium on, or before, 31st January, 1910."

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At this point, Mr. James Caird, LLD., "that friend to whom the Infirmary has been so often and to such an extent indebted", stepped in with an offer, subject to the Sanatorium, with its Endowments, being taken over by the Infirmary, to place in the hands of the Dundee Royal Infirmary Directors £10,000 in Securities, which would amount to about £1,000 per annum for ten years.

The D.R.I. Directors had, on many occasions, felt the urgency of devising some method whereby Tuberculosis might be more satisfactorily treated than was possible in the Wards of the Infirmary, and so it was with "deep satisfaction" that they were to report that they had "the near prospect of being able to provide open-air treatment for TB children and a limited number of adults suffering from phthisis." This Agreement, which was ratified by the Sidlaw Sanatorium (Transfer) Order Confirmation Act, 1910, provided that the Governors would undertake to carry on the work of the Sanatorium for at least ten years.

Although expenditure continued to exceed the income of the Sanatorium, the growing value of the Institution, which effectively improved and cured the ills of the patients, more than outweighed its financial liabilities. Due to the opening of the Munciple Sanatorium at Ashludie in 1916, there was a marked reduction in the number of adult patients in Sidlaw and so there was greater accommodation for children. Thus in 1920, when the ten year period was up, the Directors decided, "after careful consideration", to recommend to the Governors of Dundee Royal Infirmary that the work of the Sanatorium be continued meantime.

In the following years, due to financial help from the Town Council, the Voluntary Hospital Commission and other Donors, the Sanatorium was successful in its treatment of tubercular children, and provided accommodation for thirty to forty additional patients as well as elementary education for the children, through the Dundee Education Authority who furnished a schoolroom within the Sanatorium and provided a Teacher.

This happy situation continued until 1946 when the Sidlaw Sanatorium experienced

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the extreme difficulty, as throughout the country, in obtaining sufficient staff to attend tubercular patients and so it was "with the greatest regret and after prolonged and anxious consideration" that the Directors were compelled to close the Sanatorium at least temporarily.

Two years later, there were proposals to re-open the hospital, but it was not until June, 1954 that the hospital was finally re-opened to admit geriatric patients who were transferred from Maryfield Hospital while Wards 15 and 16 were being upgraded. This continued until October, 1957, when the geriatric patients were transferred back to Maryfield Hospital, and the Bughties, and Sidlaw Hospital was brought back into service as a recovery hospital.

The general opinion of Sidlaw was expressed by one patient : "I have just returned from two weeks in that delightful place, Sidlaw Hospital, and feel I would be failing in my duty as a citizen and as a patient who has derived untold benefit from being there without saying "Thank you" sincerely. The whole place and everything in it is wonderful; there is just nothing of that "institution" feeling about it. The tasteful colour schemes throughout are so excellent, all the wee "extras" that make for the patients' comfort and go to make the stay pleasant, well, one just could not help getting well in such surroundings. The entire staff too, from Sister Pearson down to the most junior Nurse, is equally praiseworthy, just cannot do enough for the "guests" comfort and well-being. Dundee is indeed fortunate to have such a grand place and in such good hands."

Sadly, Sidlaw Hospital's doors will be closing once again on Tuesday, the 4th of November, 1980 when the pre-convalescent patients will be transferred by ambulance to Royal Victoria Hospital's Ward 2. Over the past few years, there have been continuing difficulties in maintaining an adequate number of trained staff on duty at Sidlaw Hospital. The difficulties in recruitment seem to relate to the distance from the city of Dundee which greatly increases travelling time to and from work, and the problems of covering the rota of

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trained staff are exacerbated when the roads are blocked by snow and staff have often had to spend the night in the hospital because of these difficulties.

In spite of reducing the staffed available beds from forty-four to thirty-five, the difficulties have continued and the Health Board has had to agree reluctantly that Sidlaw Hospital would close.

Sidlaw Hospital has had a unique community spirit and a unique place in the community, and it will be sadly missed by the public in Dundee, the friendly neighbours in Auchterhouse (many of whom were on a volunteer fire fighters' list for help in the event of an emergency), and, last but not least, the many staff who have enjoyed working in the hospital, past and present.

- This Society was composed of Donors of not less than £25 and Annual Subscribers of not less than 10/-. It was to elect an Executive Committee which was to control, manage and administer the affairs of the Society.

Miss Alison Wood,
Administrative Trainee,
Sector Administrator's Department,
Dundee Royal Infirmary.

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