

Sorrento memories from Ann Flynn

January 2020

The following is from a conversation between Linda Gresham and Ann Flynn.

AF worked as a Ward Orderly from 1967 to 1993. The main house comprised a top floor flat, wards and a nursery on the 1st floor, a lift on the ground floor and a cellar which was where the staff used to change into uniforms. There were no locks or security in the early days. That then moved to House 14 where two women worked at sorting linen.

AF remembers the tiny switchboard above the cellar and tells of one of the domestics who had a mouse jump out of her bag after she changed her clothes to go home.

There was a rumour that the main house was listed so it would be saved but this was seemingly incorrect.

There was a dining room for the staff and a kitchen. The Orderlies wore yellow dresses.

There was a Board room with wood panelling for official meetings.

Matron Davey wore a starched cap and was very strict. There was an annual Christmas dinner for staff with a glass of sherry!!!

In the early 1970s and part of the 80s the Sorrento seemed like an extended family even though the buildings were scattered.

The two consultants were Miss Hallam and Mr Mansfield who were very kind. If a patient was poor Miss Hallam would ensure that she had extra nutrition and was allowed to stay longer than necessary to build herself up.

The biggest change was the loss of the very relaxed atmosphere. An example of this is that there was a baby with Down's Syndrome who was left in the hospital for seven months whilst foster care was sought. To her amazement and delight, AF was allowed to take the baby in her pram to her own house for a short visit which seems to be one of AF's highlights but it does illustrate the trust that was given and received and the family atmosphere. AF took a photo of this happy occasion.

The change was gradual and in the 1980s things became more structured and bureaucratic. There was a lot of pressure. Sorrento was earmarked for closure in the late 1980s and staff were fearful for their future. Different nursing grades were introduced which led to friction over roles and there was no harmony at the top level. All the staff were insecure and the trust that had been built up was lost. This continued for seven years before the final closure decision was made.

There was a toxic atmosphere and dissatisfaction.

The main feeling was that the homely atmosphere was lost to bureaucracy.

There was strong feeling that the Sorrento could and should have been saved but even when closure was due money was still spent on repairs and improvement.

Towards the end the atmosphere was toxic and the uncertainty lasted for years which did not help.

When the closure came AF took early retirement. There was a leaving party but it felt more like a wake. The staff dispersed, some of whom AF is still in touch with.