

My Auntie, Annie Downes, always wanted to be a nurse, and her family were not wealthy, and they gave up much to encourage her to achieve her ambition.

In the early days daughters of rich people sought employment as nurses, this being considered a respectable job for them, and only wealthy people could take advantage of treatment.

Nurses training was hard for those from poorer families, and one of their tasks was to scrub the ward floors.

To my Aunt's credit she became a Matron before she retired. A ward was named after her at King's Lynn hospital.

During her nursing career she spent a few years at a school for the blind, and told us how helpful one child had been in surprising her by mending her stockings, but had ruined them as she cut off the thread when she finished, and had cut a great hole through one of the stockings!!!

Things progressed, largely because of the efforts of ordinary people who saw the need for them to be able to use a hospital.

One of my tasks as a six year old, was to run round the corner to a hairdresser's shop, and hand over 6d to be put into the hospital fund. The running of this fund was voluntarily accepted by the owner of the shop.

To my father's credit, no doubt because he had been in the Ambulance division in the first World War, and was very aware of what the needs of his family may be, he made the sacrifice of paying into the scheme in return for being able to use the newly built hospital in Kettering should we need to do so.

At the beginning it was a very small cottage type hospital.

Our needs began apparent when it was fashionable for children to have their tonsils removed!!! My parents were told my sister Margaret needed this operation, and it was decided that I may as well have mine out at the same time to be company for her at the hospital!!!

Our preparation for the operation was to be bathed by a nurse.

To this day I remember enjoying that bath! I told the nurse that it was different to the one we had at home. "What is yours like?" she asked, "Ours is a tin one, and this is a pot one, I told her!!

I was young enough to be put into a cot. Margaret was next to me in a bed.

On my other side was a boy a bit older than us. His mother used to bring him treats which he was generous enough to share.

He was learning to play an accordion and a few years later played at local concerts.

I used to amuse people by telling them I had been in his bed!!! True, I was placed there by his mum to share some of the treats she had brought in!!

The beds all had to have envelops corners. These were made so tight you could hardly move your feet. The ward had to be very 'Spick and Span' when the Matron came in the morning to do her daily duty of inspecting the ward. Only after she had been were we allowed some comfort.

Each year Kettering town had what was called "The Hospital Carnival"

Much effort was put into this day to raise funds for the needs of the hospital.

We were taken to our annual pitch outside the railings of the graveyard in London Road. I think it was the best spot because no one else fancied being there!!

The usual bus stops were not in use that day! It seemed hours before we heard music from the first band.

Endless decorated floats, with all sorts of very pretty, or very funny imaginative ideas for people to throw their pennies on to.

Some preferred to throw them into buckets the people dressed as clowns walked by, Many pennies were misaimed and landed in the road, but of course it was too dangerous to run and pick them up because some people had dressed their bikes up, and we could have been knocked over. The organisers were well aware of the problem and made sure a line of people who had entered the dressing up contest formed a line to scour the road. Each penny was valuable.

At the centre of all the floats was a beautiful one with a throne, on which sat THE CARNIVAL QUEEN! She had entered many voluntary events to gain this honour!

How I wished, young as I was, that I could be sitting there one day.

My sister did become May Queen that Saint Mary's School organised for May 1st each year. At least I was chosen to dance round the Maypole!!

One year my father had the bright idea of entering a float illustrating the St, John Ambulance Brigade, Florence Nightingale tending a soldier in bed - Adult members doing first aid, and myself and a boy cadet sat at the back edge of the lorry in our uniforms!! It was a very wet day that year!!!!

The last vehicle to end the fun was always "THE DUST CART" Why we called it a cart I do not know, it was a specially made lorry, (nothing like the ones we have now though)

I watched the procession turn at Speights photographers corner to finish its rounds, I believe at the pleasure park, having been all through the town.

The community did much voluntary work to keep the hospital running, and certainly appreciated the use of it. A large house in London Road had been adapted as "The Scarlett Fever Hospital" If one was unfortunate enough to catch Tuberculosis a special hospital was available at Rushden.

With the increase in population the National Health to date has managed to cope with all the new equipment and medicines, It is when things get too large that they become unmanageable. It will take more the 6d per week to keep things running?

However there are certainly more people with much more money to spend, I feel the answer maybe each person in work having to find a hairdresser willing to organise a collection of maybe 60 pence a week? Perhaps a forfeit for those who damage their health by smoking or excessive intake of alcohol, or even participating in obvious dangerous sports?

My thanks to all the nurses and doctors who have helped me to keep healthy for, up to now - 92 years, Due to the introduction of "from cradle to grave" introduction by Bevin. (Though I must confess that at the time I was told that an amount of my wage would be taken to instigate this plan I did not fully understand the future benefits.) I had only just started to enjoy earning money.

At the time 70years was as much as anyone could hope to be alive.

20 extra years and an increase in population is certainly a huge problem.

"Here's to the National Health and all who need her. May her future be a happy one"