

ETHICAL INSPECTION

TODAY we embark on the first in a series of six features about the local health service to mark the 40th anniversary of the National Health Service tomorrow, Tuesday, July 5.

There are few institutions so jealously guarded and so highly regarded as our NHS.

Reports by KATHY STOTT

TODAY'S hospital care bears little resemblance to the treatment and nursing of yesteryear.

In the early days of the NHS it was a more leisurely affair when bedrest was the watchword, often for many weeks. Most patients today are encouraged to get up as soon as possible after treatment and are whisked out within days. Cynics decry it as a money-saving measure to "sausage machine" more patients through hospital.

But that's not to say the early years were the "good old days". The NHS was beset by crises even in infancy. A report published in 1954 which charted the progress of Kettering health district from its birth in 1948 could have been written in more recent times.

It said: "Since the inception of the National Health Service Act three well-defined phases have developed. The first, short-lived, was a period of optimism when plans for development and expansion amounting to half a million pounds were considered. The second phase, when cuts in capital and revenue estimates, revision of budgets, curtailing and abandonment of plans engendered a feeling of frustration and the third, when with the exercise of ingenuity each department and ward has been utilised economically to its maximum capacity."

Nevertheless the old times are remembered with affection by those who knew them. Eric Newman, 62, who has worked at Isebrook Hospital, Wellyingborough, as a nurse since 1947, recalls: "The hospital was mostly self-sufficient from the produce grown in the gardens. The vegetables were prepared by the inmates for all meals, there was also provision for keeping 28 pigs. The food was very good — bacon and egg for breakfast, homemade beef puddings and pies and home-cooked ham for lunch. All pastries and cakes were home-made.

"Something that stands out in my mind was when I first started at Isebrook the men had their tea in pint mugs and the women in half pint mugs."

He said: "Staff worked a 48-hour week with one day off. Starting pay for an enrolled nurse was £4 12s (£4.60) a week and top was £5 12s (£5.60). We got a four shilling a week rise every year.

Isebrook, known by various names in its history including Wellyingborough Union and Park Hospital, opened as a workhouse in 1837 and prior to the NHS was run by the county council as a welfare home. A married Master and Matron lived in the grounds.

Unlike Isebrook, Kettering had been a voluntary hospital before it was inherited by the fledgling NHS, a place where people could get treatment provided they had scimped and saved their 6d (2.5 pence) a week to pay the hospital's alms — the forerunner of social services.

The General opened in 1897 on a five acre site off Rothwell Road, given by the Duke of Buccleuch. Over the years it grew with the addition of male and female wards. Spencer and Buccleuch in the 1920s and St Crispin and St Lukes wards in 1934 off a corridor which ran parallel to Rothwell Road outside. It was at this stage in its development that the NHS took over. In later years phases 1, 2 and 3 were added resulting in the sprawling complex we know today which stands on land once occupied by gardens, orchards and fields.

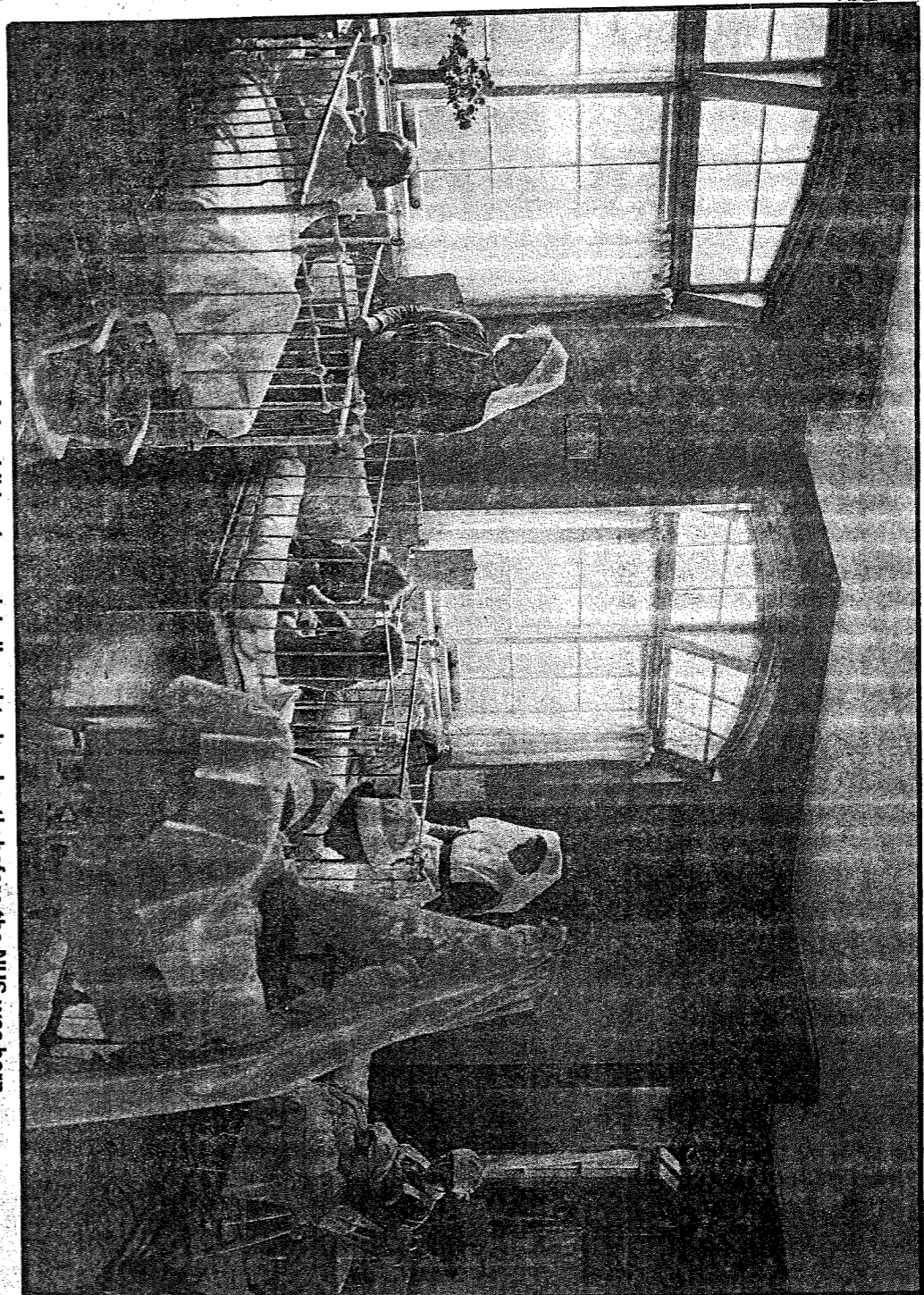
From the outset Kettering assumed the role of acute general hospital for the district, serving 170,000 people in Kettering, Burton Latimer, Higham Ferrers, Irthlingborough, Raunds, Rushden, Wellyingborough, Rothwell, Desborough, Corby and Oundle. This meant providing operating theatres, wards and all the support services on

The headlines shout "crisis" almost every day, yet we as a newspaper are deluged with letters of praise for the staff at the sharp end.

The Government constantly demands "cost improvements" in the health service,

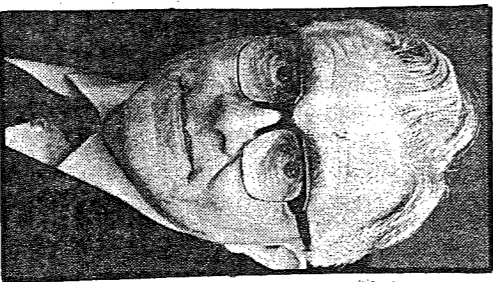
others call them "outbacks".

We do not attempt here to judge right or wrong but aim to tell the story of our local health service, its record of achievement and that of its staff — a record which we salute on the eve of its 40th birthday.



EARLY DAYS... a lovely picture of the children's ward, believed to be shortly before the NHS was born

The way we were in those very early days



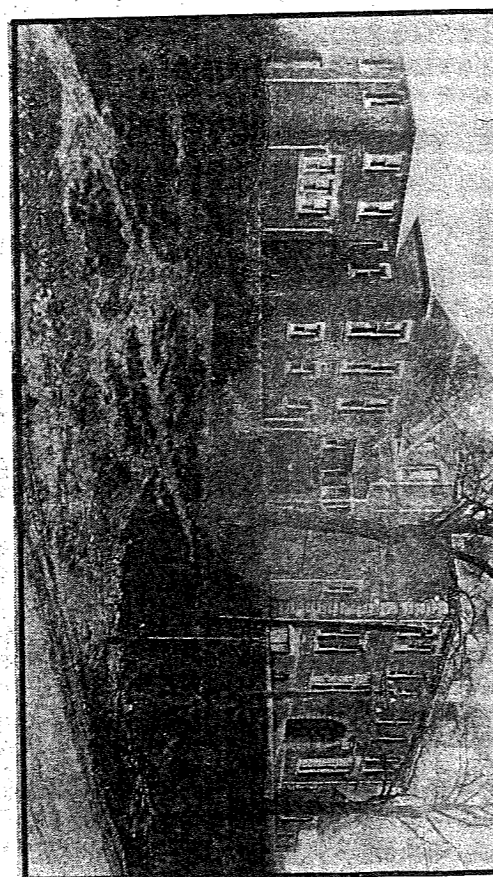
Eric Newman: "The food was very good"



Pamela Harker: "You knew all the nurses, doctors, porters, domestics and telephonists."



Edna Burdett: "Staff picked up pay packets"



THE FIRST HOSPITAL... Kettering General, opened in 1897 on land donated by the Duke of Buccleuch. The view is from Rothwell Road

the site, albeit in much more primitive form than today.

There were other hospitals in the group besides Isebrook and Kettering General: Rockingham Road, Kettering, an old isolation hospital, now closed; St Mary's, Kettering, a long-stay and maternity hospital, now housing mainly elderly patients; Wellyingborough Cottage Hospital, a small general and gynaecological hospital, now closed; Wellyingborough Highfield Hospital, an old infectious diseases hospital, a former sanatorium, now used for elderly mentally ill and young

mentally handicapped patients; and Oundle Hospital for the elderly, now closed. The NHS opened the Nutfield Diagnostic Centre, Corby, in 1954. Pamela Harker, 59, senior ward sister on Lilford C a private ward at Kettering General, began nursing in 1947 arriving in Kettering in 1952.

She said: "It was nicely compact with everything leading off one long corridor. You knew all the nurses, doctors, porters, domestics and telephonists."

"It was used to Matrons, Home Sisters, Housekeepers, all these titles have gone now. Turnover of patients is much higher. If you had an appendix out you were in bed for 10 days. Today if you have major surgery you're up the next day to prevent thrombosis and chest infections.

Friendliness

She said: "When Warren Hill House was a nurses' home there was a lovely lounge downstairs with a fire. We used to have a tennis court and play in the evenings. There was much more friendliness among the nurses. Living in, you got to know one another. Prizegiving was a big occasion for the

nurses with two lovely marquees on the lawn, one for the ceremony, one a tea tent.

"The gardeners were wonderful. They grew all the vegetables for the hospital. At the back of Warren Hill House, now a car park, there were gardens for the staff and patients. It was nice and quiet, peaceful. I'm pleased I've seen the old days."

Edna Burdett, 60, another Kettering old-timer who started as an office clerk at Kettering General in 1946, has seen increasing centralisation and a growing obsession with statistics to measure performance, resulting in a mushrooming of administration.

Self-sufficiency in produce was one of the victims. Edna remembers: "You used to see the gardeners wheeling their wheelbarrows up and down the corridor." She also knew all the staff — they used to report to the office

every week to pick up their pay packets, again something which has disappeared in the hi-tech age.

John Hughes, senior planning officer for the health authority and a trained nurse, said: "One of the things that fascinates me is how a whole range of diseases have disappeared. We no longer see rheumatic fever, scarlet fever and tuberculosis, which was the reason for the setting-up of a sanatorium.

He said the image of nursing had also changed dramatically over the years: "They are no longer considered handmaidens" which is an indication of how far nursing has come. There's very much more professionalism now."

TOMORROW: X-Ray and Nuclear Medicine — pushing back the frontiers of technology to save lives.