

Tony Smith pays tribute to a legendary local health service pioneer



WHEN Agnes Jackson Ward was opened at Kettering General Hospital in May, 1960, there was only one choice to perform the official ceremony - the former matron after whom it was named.

Burnley-born Miss Jackson, who retired two years earlier, was appointed to the post in 1935 and helped lay the foundations of patient care in the area after the introduction of the National Health Service in 1948.

Plans to rename what is now the main children's ward following a £700,000 revamp have upset some people who remember the much-loved stalwart who headed the hospital's training school for 23 years. When she died in 1984 aged 80, more than 200 nurses, doctors and former patients attended a memorial service at Kettering Parish Church.

Miss Jackson, the daughter of a dental surgeon, trained at the Royal Liverpool Children's Hospital and the Victoria Hospital in Burnley. After serving as sister at a Birmingham nursing home, she was assistant matron at the Central Middlesex County Hospital before heading 70 other applicants for the Kettering post.

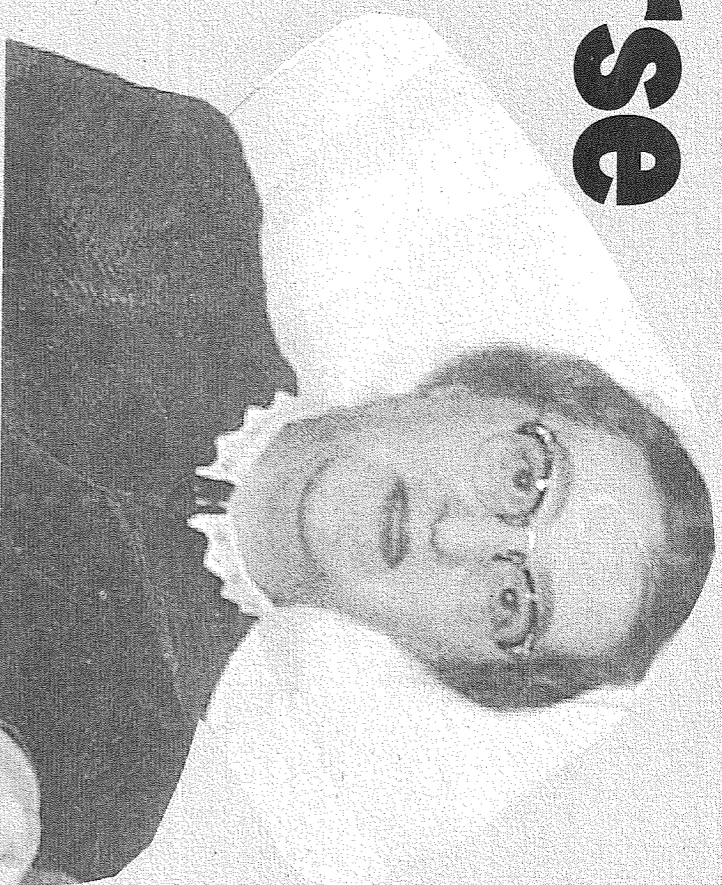
At 31 she was comparatively young for such a responsible position. Paid a princely £180 a year, her administrative duties extended to other hospitals in the town and she soon had an impact, sprucing up the nurses' home and laundry maids' quarters and introducing new-style and longer-lasting nurses' uniforms.

In her first year, KGH had 11 trained nurses (including herself) and 24 trainees, under her supervision. By her retirement this had risen to 38 trained staff and 72 students. During her period of office the number of beds rose from 108 to 171 and major changes followed the advent of the NHS.

In those days matrons had all-pervasive powers, from appointing new staff to decorating the wards. Miss Jackson set high standards and expected the same from those in her charge, including domestic staff. During a severe shortage of maids in 1950, she recruited Italian maids to KGH and Germans at St Mary's Hospital.

A healthy respect for nurse Agnes

Matron who gave her name to ward, commands fierce loyalty to this day



While she fought to improve her staff's pay, living conditions, hours of work and education, she was also a strict disciplinarian. On finding too much crockery was being broken on the wards, she asked the hospital board if she could impose a small fine - the committee compromised by offering a small prize for the "least broken" ward.

On Miss Jackson's recommendation, sisters were introduced at all hospital

departments, including casualty and outpatients, and she appointed the hospital's first psychiatrist. Her pioneering work to make KGH a teaching hospital paved the way for later developments such as the Post-Graduate Medical Centre.

The new £22,000 ward named after her began with 26 beds and was used for many years as an adult general medical ward.

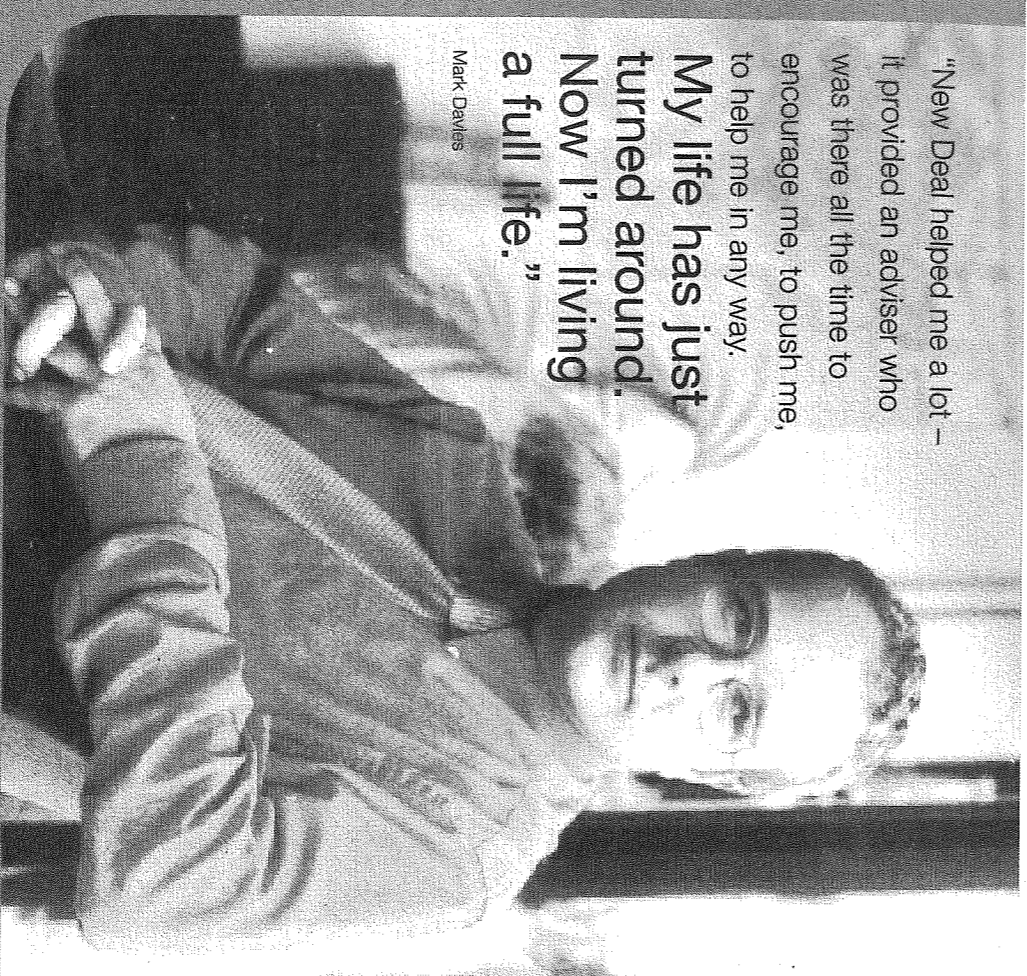
After being given a guided tour, Miss Jackson declared it was "delightful", adding: "The patients will enjoy the many comforts and amenities provided, I am sure."

Miss Jackson's final years were spent with her sister Annie, younger by two years, in a residential home in Aldeburgh, Suffolk, and she died in Ipswich Hospital after a short illness. At her memorial service,

retired pathologist Dr Harold Voss said in his address: "Her work laid the foundations for the hospital we have today. If not for her and her like, Kettering would not have its hospital."

Former friend Dr John Nottley, a local GP after whom a unit is named at St Mary's Hospital, said: "Agnes was a wonderful woman and we all loved her. She was a great organiser and friendly towards everyone."

The re-designed ward is expected to open by April and a competition to find a new name is open to children under 14. The deadline is February 1 and entries, with name, address, age and phone number, should be sent to Katrina Allen, Agnes Jackson Ward, KGH, Rothwell Road, Kettering, NN16 8UZ.



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FAREWELL - pictured with Miss Jackson at her leaving party in 1958, back row from left: Mr Phillips, Dr Voss, Dr Wigglesworth, Mr Radcliffe, Mr Cullen, Dr Hodgson Jones. Front: Dr Philip Smith and Dr Partington.

10 years ago

25 years ago

50 years ago

CARRY On star Barbara Windsor launched a sponsored drive around Britain by county police to raise money for a special school in Northampton.

Pupils at Whitefriars Junior School in Rushden used credit cards at their tuck shop in a scheme to teach them about plastic money. Plans to bring cable TV to 96,000 homes in the area were shelved.

FIFTEEN pigeons were stolen from a fancier's home in Burton Latimer - the second such theft from his loft in nine months.

Youngsters on a job creation scheme began work on restoring historic Ashton Mill, near Oundle, to its former glory.

Supt Roy Kitson succeeded the late Chief Supt Hugh Ward as commander of the Kettering police division.

CLOWNS from a circus at the Savoy Theatre, Kettering, paid a surprise visit to sick children at the town's general hospital.

Work began to dump an estimated 120,000 wartime bombs believed hidden in haystacks near Desborough.

Corby soldier Charles Brerley wrote to his family to tell how British POWs had spent Christmas at a camp in war-torn Korea.