

One hundred years of Barts Guild

This year marks the centenary of The Guild of the Royal Hospital of St Bartholomew's. Starting out as a sewing circle that made nightgowns and bandages for the hospital's patients, the Guild has, over the years, grown to a quiet army of volunteers providing a wide range of invaluable support services.

When Lady Eleanor Sandhurst and five consultants' wives formed the St Bartholomew's Hospital Women's Guild in 1911, there were strict conditions for the 368 founding members. Being a dab hand with a sewing needle was a vital prerequisite, as members were expected to make at least two garments a year, along with providing an annual subscription to help cover Guild expenses.

As Ann Wickham, current president of The Guild of the Royal Hospital of St Bartholomew's (renamed when men were invited to join in 1979), explained: "The members provided nightclothes to the patients – men, women and children, who often had none of their own. Typically, a shirt would also be provided on discharge."

The Guild's general arrangements from 1911 make clear the standards that were expected of members: "Great care will be exercised in giving away clothes to necessitous patients on leaving the hospital, but it is important that the

clothes should be of the shape and quality approved by the hospital." Keen members were referred to the Guild's Honorary Work Secretary, a Mrs Tooth of Harley Street, who "will supply patterns, or cut out garments, and state the cost of materials required for each garment."

The outbreak of World War One brought new pressures to the hospital, with Barts staff tending wounded soldiers in the hospital's east wing and at a base hospital in Camberwell, south London. The Guild swung into action. Money was raised for blankets and water bottles; branches sprang up in the home counties and far-flung cities such as Buenos Aires and Cairo, where people had connections with Barts. Sewing was frantic: clothes, bandages and padding for crutches and splints; extra cash for a comfort fund providing Bovril and other healthy, hearty drinks for patients. Guild members also offered a form of early occupational therapy – teaching the wounded soldiers to embroider regimental badges, which they could sell.

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After the war, the Guild continued to diversify its activities, including an 18th-century-themed Hogarth Fair, held in 1936 – marking 200 years since the artist produced his famous paintings for Barts – which raised £60,000 in today's money. The first Barts Guild shop opened during the Second World War, providing clothing, household goods, comfort and tea for people bombed out of their homes in the City.

With the advent of the NHS in 1948, the Guild focused more on providing amenities and home comforts for wards, sitting rooms and staff quarters, such as kettles, cushions or TVs. Money raised by the Guild over the years has funded the purchase of vital medical equipment – such as six beds for the



Centenary events

To mark 100 years of helping patients and staff, the Barts Guild Centenary Fair will take place in the Great Hall at Barts on Wednesday 25 May. A day-long party with stalls, entertainment and refreshments will include a book-signing by renowned author and biographer Sir Michael Holroyd. The Guild's Annual Meeting will be on 20 October, when President Ann Wickham will launch her book on the Guild's history, following a service at St Bartholomew's-the-Less.

intensive care unit in 1980 – and outings and events for patients. Members also play a very hands-on role, including among other things providing a trolley service to wards (first launched in 1946) and giving directions to help patients and visitors find their way around the hospital.

By 1960, a flower shop was opened, and, in 1972, a general shop for patients and staff, which is today run by a Guild-funded full-time manager and volunteers.

Present-day President, Ann Wickham, wife of retired consultant urologist John Wickham and a member since 1968, sees the modern Guild still offering a flexible combination of fundraising and practical help. But, however much the Guild has evolved since its sewing-bee origins, the essential role of its members remains unchanged from their original aim to: "do all that may be possible to help the patients and to strengthen the hands of those engaged in combating disease and ministering to the sick."



Barts Guild is always looking for new volunteers to join them in their work in the Trust. To find out more about becoming a volunteer, please contact **Karen Undrill**, Voluntary Services Co-ordinator, on tel **020 346 56011**.

