

Royal connections at The Royal London

This year marks the 20th anniversary since The Royal London Hospital was granted its royal title by Queen Elizabeth II. But, while the name is relatively new, the support shown by kings and queens to the hospital extends back over several centuries.

Founded as The London Infirmary in 1740, The London Hospital benefited from noble patronage from the outset. The 2nd Duke of Richmond (an illegitimate grandson of Charles II) was its first president, and, in 1758, the hospital was granted a Royal Charter by George II. The charter refers to the work undertaken by the hospital to relieve the suffering of patients 'labouring under malignant and painful diseases and a variety of fatal accidents'. George II's son, Prince William Henry, was the first royal to visit the hospital, in 1789. In 1864, it was the turn of Queen Victoria's son, the Prince of Wales (later to be King Edward VII), who laid the foundation stone of the new West Wing of the hospital.

Queen Victoria also showed her support for The London Hospital. In 1876, she and her daughter Princess Beatrice opened the hospital's Grocers' Wing. The honour was significant, as it was Victoria's first visit to the East End since the death of her husband, Prince Albert, 15 years before, and she received huge ovations from the crowds lining her route through the City. According to Punch magazine, the Queen 'went around the wards, saying kind things to the patients, lingering longest by the bedside of the sick children'.

Saving the King's life

Of all the royals, Edward VII was the one who had most reason to be grateful for the hospital's clinical expertise. On the eve of his coronation, in 1902, he was stricken with appendicitis, and the ceremony had to be postponed so that emergency life-saving surgery could be carried out by renowned London Hospital surgeon Sir Frederick Treves – although the operation itself was performed at Buckingham Palace rather than at the hospital.

Edward VII's wife, Queen Alexandra, went on to become the hospital's president and is

Above: A statue of Queen Alexandra in the garden at The Royal London

commemorated both in Alexandra (Alex) Wing and in the statue in the hospital's garden – the only one of her in the UK. The bas relief on the back of the statue depicts the King and Queen – and, significantly, Frederick Treves – at the opening of the Outpatients Department at the hospital in 1903.

Mother-in-law's footsteps

Queen Mary (the wife of George V) followed in her mother-in-law's footsteps as the hospital's president and a frequent visitor to the hospital. Subsequent queens have continued to have close and very personal connections with both The London Hospital and Queen Elizabeth Children's Hospital (which nowadays forms part of Barts and The London's Children's Hospital).

“ Queen Alexandra was the hospital's president and is commemorated both in Alexandra Wing and in the statue in the hospital's garden – the only one of her in the UK. ”



HRH Queen Elizabeth II visited the hospital the day after the London bombings in 2005

The name of the Queen Elizabeth Children's Hospital was drawn from both the current Queen and her mother, and it was there that the young Princess Elizabeth gave her first public speech, in 1944.

Royal title

Following her coronation, Her Royal Highness Queen Elizabeth II became The London Hospital's Patron in 1953. And in 1990, marking the hospital's 250th anniversary, granted it a royal title – only the second time she had honoured a hospital in this way. The honour was in recognition of the hospital's long association with the Royal Family, together with its services to the local community and contribution to medical and nursing progress.

She returned to The Royal London in 1998, to open the Queen Elizabeth's Children Service, which had moved to the hospital from the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. Her most recent visit to the hospital was on 8 July 2005, the day after the London terrorist bombings, when she met with staff and praised them for treating many of those who had been injured.