



An early image of The London Chest Hospital

# Founding spirit



Prescot Street, where The Royal London was based before moving to Whitechapel



Henry VIII's connection with Barts is commemorated in his statue over the main entrance

**Two pubs and a holy vision – these are the somewhat unlikely origins that led to the founding of Barts and The London's hospitals. The vault explores how Barts, The Royal London and The London Chest came into being and how some of our clinicians became founding fathers – and mothers – in their own right.**

## The start of Barts

St Bartholomew's Hospital was founded in 1123 as part of the Priory of St Bartholomew. Its founder, Rahere, was a royal courtier and favourite of King Henry I, before dedicating his life to religious works. Surviving malaria on a pilgrimage to Rome, he had a vision of St Bartholomew, urging him to build a church and hospital in Smithfield.

In the early medieval period, the sick were treated by the brethren and sisters of the priory, where Rahere was Prior until his death in 1145. But, the hospital gradually became independent from the priory and, in 1546, the longer-term future of the hospital was secured when it was re-founded by Henry VIII, following the closure of the priory in the dissolution of the monasteries.

## A meeting in a pub

The Royal London began life as a result of a meeting between seven men in the Feathers Tavern in Cheapside in September 1740, which led to the founding of The London Infirmary (renamed The London Hospital in 1748 and The Royal London in 1990). Among them was a 22-year-old surgeon called John Harrison, who is today regarded as the virtual founder of the hospital.

Supported by charitable funding, Harrison secured the lease to the London's first premises in Moorfields. A few months later, the hospital moved to rented premises in Prescott Street – just down the road from offices currently occupied by the Trust –

before taking up residence in its brand new building in Whitechapel in 1757. John Harrison remained involved with the hospital until his death and his name lives on today in Harrison Ward.

## Another pub meeting

It was another pub meeting that led to the founding of The London Chest Hospital, when, in 1848, a group of philanthropic bankers and merchants got together at the City's London Tavern. Spurred on by the impact of tuberculosis, which was responsible for 20% of all deaths at the time, they decided to set up a service to treat the poor of the City and east London.

Beginning with an outpatients dispensary in Liverpool Street, they obtained a site on Crown land in Bethnal Green, where Prince Albert laid the foundation stone in 1851. Royal connections helped raise £30,000 to build an 80-bed hospital, which opened in 1855, primarily for patients with TB and then becoming world-renowned for the wider treatment of heart and lung diseases.

## Clinical founders and nursing firsts

With a long history of eminent physicians in our hospitals, it is not surprising that some of them went on to found groundbreaking clinical institutions. John Freke, an outstanding 18th-century surgeon and governor at Barts, played a prominent part in the separation of surgeons from barbers and the establishment of the Company of Surgeons in 1745.

Combining clinical skills with a vivid and eccentric personality, surgeon John Abernethy was another 18th-century medical celebrity, who is today regarded as the founder of Barts Medical School. Appointed assistant surgeon at Barts in 1787, he started lecturing on anatomy in his home. His lectures were so popular that more space was needed and a purpose-built lecture theatre was created.

Over at The London Hospital, surgeon William Blizard and his physician colleague James Maddocks created the first hospital-based medical school in England in 1785, combining clinical teaching for medical students with lectures and anatomy classes. In 1791, Blizard also founded the Samaritan Society, the first medical social work society.

Another London Hospital surgeon, Thomas John Barnardo, was so shocked by the poverty of east London and the hundreds of deserted children sleeping rough, that he opened the first of his Doctor Barnardo's Homes in Stepney Causeway in 1867.

A number of Barts and The London nurses were also at the forefront of their profession. Eva Luckes, Matron at The London, founded the first preliminary nurse training school in England at the hospital in 1895. In 1919, the Nurses Registration Act was passed, setting up a structure for the state registration of nurses. This followed a strenuous campaign by former Barts Matron Ethel Bedford Fenwick, who became the first state registered nurse in the country.