

INSIDE SUFFOLK'S HOSPITALS

before the NHS

Danielle Lett heads to The Hold to uncover what healthcare in the region was like centuries ago

In 2023, it's hard to imagine life without the NHS. Established in 1948 following the end of the Second World War, the now-historic institution was created on the basis that healthcare should be available to everyone in the UK based on their needs, and not on their ability to pay.

But what about life before the NHS? I was curious to find out what people in Suffolk did in the late 19th and early 20th century when they got sick, and how the hospitals were established, so I made my way to The Hold to find out more.

I met with senior archivist Bridget Hanley, who was able to give a brief overview of healthcare here in the county all those years ago.

"The challenge for me was that there isn't a folder in the archives marked 'Suffolk hospitals' or 'Ipswich hospitals', so I had a lovely time digging in the archives and found lots of interesting stuff," she says.

There were three buildings she wanted to focus on - the East Suffolk and Ipswich Hospital, the Ipswich Sanatorium, and St Audry's Hospital in Melton.

The East Suffolk and Ipswich Hospital was founded in 1835 by public subscription by local residents, and opened as the East

RIGHT:
The Goodrich Ward
at East Suffolk and
Ipswich Hospital

BELOW:
The Hold's senior
archivist Bridget
Hanley

Pictures: NEWSQUEST

Suffolk and Ipswich Hospital and Dispensary in August 1836. Designed by John Whitling, a children's wing was added in 1875 and when it joined the NHS in 1948 it became the Ipswich Hospital, Anglesea Road Wing before closing in 1985 after services were transferred to Ipswich Hospital, Heath Road Wing.

The Ipswich Sanatorium, also known as the King Edward Memorial Sanatorium, was established in 1912 and was based on Foxhall Road. It was built as an isolation hospital for people with lung disorders, particularly tuberculosis (TB) sufferers.

And St Audry's Hospital, which opened in 1832 as the Suffolk County Asylum, was a pioneering hospital in its treatment of mental illness. Dr John Kirkman, who was the medical superintendent between 1829 and 1876, believed that 'no restraint can be employed which is so powerful as tenderness'.

"However, I actually discovered the earliest hospital in the county was the Suffolk General Hospital in Bury, which was established in 1825. It was also funded by subscribers, who could recommend people for treatment. Not wanting to be outdone by West Suffolk, East Suffolk came up with the East Suffolk and Ipswich Hospital 10 years later," explains Bridget.

East Suffolk and Ipswich Hospital: 'A modern infirmary' A leaflet detailing the history of East Suffolk and Ipswich Hospital describes its opening and says: "It was in about the year 1835 that some worth residents of the ancient Borough of Ipswich bethought them to build 'an asylum for the Halt, the Lame, and the blind', and by the following year the building became an accomplished fact. The 'asylum' was the first general hospital for the district, and was named 'The East Suffolk and Ipswich Hospital'.

The leaflet says its original structure featured an Ionic-columned portico, and that it was designed for 'about 30 patients, an accommodation considered sufficient for the requirements of the district at the time.'

In 1869, a storey was added, and wards were built out on their side. And in 1875, a children's wing was erected to the memory



of the late John Patterson Cobbold, and was named the Cobbold Wing. In 1911, open-air balconies were added to this ward and were named the Pamela Cobbold Balconies. Other additions included a hospital chapel built in 1891, and the Victoria Wing which was added in 1897 as a Jubilee Memorial.

A newspaper cutting from The Ipswich Independent, dated December 5, 1908, describes the hospital as 'a modern infirmary', and goes into further detailing explaining how the healthcare centre was modernised and adapted as the needs of the patient and healthcare provider changed. It says: "When the reconstruction scheme now in progress at the Ipswich and East Suffolk Hospital is completed, the institution will rank as one of the finest in the Eastern Counties."

Additions included an electrical lift, an operating theatre which cost £240, and laundry appliances which at the time were state-of-the-art.

The newspaper article goes on to say: "Having undergone a preliminary sorting, the clothes are placed in a 'hydro', a machine filled with hot water and soap, revolving at the rate of 2,000 revolutions a minute. From this they are removed to a drying machine worked on the

centrifugal principle at great speed. Other ingenious appliances include a starch mixing machine, and a contrivance worked by exhaust steam for drying purposes, a calendar, a machine for treating foul linen, a mangle, and a collar machine (gas heated). A small room is used for heating irons. After going through the difficult process, the clothes find their way to a packing room where the nurses', servants' and patients' clothes are dealt with."

Every week, the East Suffolk and Ipswich Hospital dealt with anywhere between 2,500 and 2,700 pieces of clothes, covering 'about one hundred patients and fifty of the staff.'

But in a time before the NHS, where healthcare is now available for all, how would people receive treatment in the late 19th and early 20th century? Most healthcare was private or voluntary, and people would have to pay for any services they needed.

"It's very difficult to imagine the position of someone who didn't have the NHS. In a book for the Bury Hospital, it says they kept four beds for accidents, and that 'no soldier shall be admitted as an outpatient until his officer or some responsible person has agreed to pay his subsistence money.' It was very much something that people





needed to pay for in those days, and it's a completely different world to today," explains Bridget.

"A lot of people ended up in workhouse infirmaries where they provided their own healthcare, but I'm not sure what the treatment would've been like there. But the fact these hospitals kept expanding showed there were more people needing treatment."

The Ipswich Sanatorium: 'Unanimously agreed that a sanatorium was urgently needed' Opened in 1912, the Ipswich Sanatorium, was also known as King Edward Memorial Sanatorium. A souvenir booklet in The Hold's archives describes it as having been 'built by public subscription, in the centre of a splendid stretch of heathland lying between Ipswich and the sea.'

Chairman of the Public Health Committee Alderman W. F. Paul spoke in favour of sanatorium treatment, and in a medical officer's annual report it said: 'His idea of a sanatorium was that people who had a slight tendency to consumption should be able to go there, and then they would have a chance of recovery. And in connection with the death of the King, knowing the ideas expressed by his late Majesty, the thought something might be done to bring about the provision of

such an institution.'

On May 23 that year, the East Anglian Daily Times printed a summary of the Medical Officer's Report, and Dr H. H. Brown wrote in a letter to the editor where he said: 'At a recent meeting of the doctors of this town, it was unanimously agreed that a sanatorium for the treatment of tubercular lung disease is urgently needed. We, who are on the staff of the hospital, are frequently called upon to treat early or late cases of consumption in the outpatient department. We can do practically nothing for them, except give advice, which owing to their circumstances of their position, they are unable to benefit by.'

'We watch their downward progress, week by week, until they become too ill to attend and the inevitable arrives. Many of these cases could be cured if properly treated in a sanatorium at an early stage of the disease.'

According to the booklet, Ipswich Sanatorium was built on a piece of land stretching 15 acres on Foxhall Road, about three miles from the Cornhill. It had space for 65 patients (40 males and 25 females), and housed a sanitary annex which was equipped with shower baths, and lavatories. Hot water was provided by means of calorifiers.

TOP:
The children's summer house at East Suffolk and Ipswich Hospital

ABOVE:
Ipswich Sanatorium King Edward VII's memorial entrance, lodge and gates c. 1911

The booklet goes on to say that 'the cost of the institution was defrayed by public subscription as a memorial to King Edward VII. The sanatorium opened on June 14, 1912, and its first patient was admitted on July 3 that same year. It then closed down in 1975.'

St Audry's Hospital: 'A pioneering hospital' "The third hospital worth looking at is St Audry's Hospital, which was the county lunatic asylum, or what we'd refer to today as a mental health hospital," explains Bridget.

The archive at The Hold captures a snapshot of life at the hospital between 1841 and 1985, and demonstrates that it was pioneering in its treatment of mental illness, combining traditional medication with daily tasks such as sewing and carpentry.

"They also had a market garden to grow fruit and veg. It's very early occupational therapy before that was even a thing."

Suffolk Archives has around 850 photos of patient sports days, Christmas events and entertainers at the hospital. These were designed to involve patients and their recovery without total reliance on medical treatments, and was pioneered by medical superintendent Dr Kirkman.

At its peak, St Audry's cared for

1,200 patients before finally closing its doors in 1993.

"St Audry's was very progressive, and Dr Kirkman appeared to have a humane view of how to look after patients. Thankfully, attitudes have since changed tremendously."

The hospital used to organise dances for the patients, and there were instructions for the staff to encourage involvement. Suffolk District Asylum regulations and instructions for attendants and nurses, dated c. 1910, said: "It is necessary that the staff should realise that entertainments and dances are primarily for the good and benefit of the patients. They should therefore devote their attention to interesting patients in them, inducing them to take part. No patient should ever feel compelled to sit down through being unable to find a partner for a dance."

"Looking at the photos, you get an impression that people are having a good time, and the staff made things as good as they could for the patients. And within the collection, we sometimes find letters from the families of patients, thanking them for curing them. But you also find the sad stories, too."

To find out more about The Hold and its archives, visit suffolkarchives.co.uk