

TOUCHYER COLLAR, NEVER SWALLER

FOREWORD

The Waltham Forest Oral History Workshop was formed in the Summer of 1983 by a group, enthusiastic to tap the valuable source of social history available through the memories of local inhabitants.

We are collecting the memories and reminiscences of elderly people in Waltham Forest, talking to them about their lives and their history. Topics such as growing-up in the area, memories of school and other children's institutions, street life and entertainment have already come to light. From the material gathered together in taped conversations a vivid picture of the area is emerging.

We hope to publish a series of pamphlets on Waltham Forest history as remembered by the people who live there. The first project concentrated on Health and Welfare provision. The resultant booklet grew from the mass of material collected and focuses on two of the most widely remembered institutions, the School Clinic in Lloyd Park (now the William Morris Gallery) and Fever Isolation Hospitals.

The Workshop meets in the local history Museum of Waltham Forest - Vestry House Museum - and new members are always welcome. Information can be obtained from the Museum and those interested in the group or its work should contact us via the Vestry House Museum, Vestry Road, Walthamstow, E17 9NH (Tel. 020 8509 1917).

[Susan Ashworth]
Vestry House Museum

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INTRODUCTION

Lloyd Park Mansion was once William Morris' family home and is presently the William Morris Gallery. Between about 1911 and 1943 it used to house the children's medical and dental Services, and is remembered by at least two generations of Waltham Forest residents with mixed feelings.

As Miss McDonnell recalls:

I don't think - if you speak to anybody of my age and ask them about Lloyd Park they'll have forgotten what that was like. It was in what's called the Water House, the art gallery now. I don't know how much of it was clinic. I believe some of it might have been health offices.

And Mrs Brooking described it as:

a very busy little clinic largely because in those days mums and dads had to pay for things, if you went to doctors. (This treatment was free) it was given under the council, you see, from the schools. And we were treated, we used to have to go, it was on the first floor of the manse, the old manse, and it was set out as a clinic and there were nurses there and attendants and the doctor - I can't remember his name - but he was the Medical Officer of Health for Walthamstow at that time. But not all diseases could be treated at Lloyd Park Mansion. Medicine has progressed so much in the past fifty years that we forget the effects that epidemics and acute infectious diseases had, well within the life-times of those alive today. Diphtheria and scarlet fever (also known as scarletina) were infections whose effects are vastly reduced today.

In the three years 1976-8 there were four cases of diphtheria in England and Wales, with none of them fatal, yet in 1940 there were 45,000 cases with 2,400 deaths.

Though the antitoxin used in treatment was discovered in 1894, and which stimulates the body's own defence mechanisms, it wasn't until 1940 that a national campaign to immunise children against the disease was started.

Diphtheria generally starts in the throat, developing into thick mucous deposit which can spread down the throat and appear on any surface wound on the body; there may also be a fever and there can be serious effects on other parts of the body and general health. The main treatment was rest.

Miss Waterton can remember:

being as flat as the floor, laid quite flat, they wouldn't move me for anything. Scarlet fever starts with a rash covering much of the body, followed by changes to the appearance of the tongue. Like diphtheria, it is highly contagious and patients were isolated from all others unless they stopped being infectious. Treatment for scarlet fever was not possible until the discovery of an antibiotic type drug in 1935.

In what is now Waltham Forest, patients were isolated hospitals in Leyton, near the site of the Coronation Gardens, and at Chingford Hospital, on the present site near Chingford Hatch.

Mrs Jenny Hammond recalls it:

There was a Fever Hospital, as they called it, in Leyton, a wooden hut next to the dust destructor over in the road going along to Markhouse Road, Church Road. You can just imagine what a dust destructor was like in those days, because it was all fire ash that came in the dust-vans, and that was all tipped over in there.

I can remember it was supposed to have been a temporary building although it had been up for over twenty years when I went in to see it (as a Councillor) because I happened to go on the Hospital Committee.

The Fever hospital in Leyton opened in 1896 with forty-eight beds, and was enlarged later to ninety-four beds. It was closed in 1939 after Leyton bought a half share in Chingford isolation hospital (in 1938) which had been open since 1901. Chingford Hospital ceased being an infectious diseases hospital in 1953.

The highly infectious nature of the diseases encouraged rapid transmission in schools and families and children could be taken for a test just because they had been in contact with someone else who had the disease. That might be the reason for a visit to Lloyd Park Mansion, but there might be other reasons for a person's first visit.

I'LL GIVE YOU A CARD TO GO TO LLOYD PARK

Mrs Brooking was referred by the school:

I had some ulcers on the eyes and I had very bad styes and although my mother had taken me to a doctor, the school still insisted that I went to the clinic under the Medical Officer of Health which used to be there in those days. And then he examined us and gave the nurses the instructions what they had to do and I had to attend there three times a week. I suppose I was under there for about a couple of months, and I used to have to have these drops in my eyes and my mother used to take me there, and I can remember it was the latter part of the war because I can remember my mother lining up for vegetables as we came home, you know, if there was anything going. We didn't have ration books not until the latter part of the war and if you saw anything going in the shops you just lined up, you know?

The only treatment I had was the drops in the eyes, and then they gave my mother ointment to pull on the eyelids, at night, which was in those days called Golden Eye Ointment. It's got some different name now, but that's what we used to know it as.

There were other treatments available at Lloyd Park Mansion too, as Mrs Brooking recalls:

Because we were in those days a bit undernourished, there were lots of boils, abscesses and that sort of thing. The children used to go there for the dressings, and bathings and, you know, odd treatments, poultices and things put on them.

There were lots of children there and I always remember that one boy - he was quite a big lad - he was about thirteen or fourteen, and he was crying making a terrible noise and I was sitting in the chair and the nurse said to this boy 'Now look here, this little girl is having drops in her eyes and she's not making any fuss', and this boy was yelling away and the nurse was putting the drops in my eyes and it was from this stage that I made up my mind when I got older I'd be a nurse. And I went in for nursing, and it was that initial treatment that gave me the idea of being a nurse.

Miss Joyce Dyer and her mother together recalled when Mrs Dyer took her daughter to Lloyd Park Mansion in a push-chair. Miss Dyer reminded her mother:

You couldn't get me up the steps and you left me outside. When you came out I was gone. I thought she was pushing me down to this gardener to help out. So there I was, I got to where the gardener was and I was out of my chair.

Mrs Dyer:

I thought I'd put the brake on. She thought I was pushing her. She didn't hurt herself, thank God.

Miss Dyer:

Poor gardener, he looked. He didn't know what was coming at him. When I was in Brookfield (Hospital) they used to let you out for a break, and that was one of the times. To go to see Dr. Powell.

Miss Dyer was in Brookfield House Hospital in Hale End Road for ten years. She was admitted at the age of six. Apart from occasional fortnight spent at home, she was only allowed to see her parents for an hour, every two weeks on a Sunday.

Mrs May Williams was sent to Lloyd Park Mansion by her school:

I had this little place on my arm and I used to keep scratching it. It never went into a sore but it got bigger and it moved up my arm. The teacher at school said 'that looks like ringworm, and you shouldn't be at school. I'll give you a card to go to Lloyd Park'. She gave me this card, and a girl in another class also had a card. She'd got to go. So we went up to Lloyd Park. They put some stuff on it and bound it up. The doctor there said 'you can go to school as long as you keep it covered over'. This other girl was going as well. There were only trams and you never got any passes to travel on trams as the kids do now, so she said to me I don't like walking all that way. I'm going on my bike. You get up early and I'll meet you there'. So the next time we went I walked up there and she went on her bike. We both came together. She said 'come on, jump on the back, and we went spinning round the Park. We did that several times, and when we got back to school the teacher said 'you are late'. We said 'yes Miss. There were crowds up there. It must have been catching'.

Well one day we went flying round on this bike at the back (of the Mansion) and they must have looked out of the window and saw us and reported it to school, because the next time we had to go, the teacher gave us a yellow card and she said 'bring this back when you go.' And we gave it in. And when they gave it back they had put the time we left. So that put paid to all our larks.

Mrs Brooking recalled that the layout of the first floor of Lloyd Park Mansion was:

the whole of a very large room on the first floor, because we used to have to go up the stairs on to the first floor and it was laid out like a typical type of clinic with chairs and a sort of little waiting area where you waited to be seen, and there were these chairs around and treatment couches and everything looked very hospitalised, you know, like a little hospital. We used to have the treatment and then come out and we always had to see the doctor about every other week, we just didn't go on, we had to see the doctor.

When Mr Norman Taylor arrived with his mother:

We were met by the receptionist, who was in fact my cousin, who fairly recently started work in the Health Department, and spent his whole working career first in Walthamstow Council, then Waltham Forest, ending as Principal Admin. Officer in the Health Department.

So he took my particulars at the desk, which was very embarrassing for both of us, because he was trying to make out he didn't know anything about us, and was asking questions which my mother said 'don't be foolish Fred, you know all about that', which was embarrassing him more, because his boss was in the same room.

I can remember tall old desks, almost Dickensian, in there. People just sat at them and wrote, very dingy. The office was all brown as far as I can remember. You went in the front door and there was a reception room with a counter and a desk behind it. The treatment was carried out on the upper floor overlooking the park at the back. They did it there and then. I was, after my particulars were taken, taken up the stairs in fear and trepidation of what was going to happen.

Mrs Bella Quaif took her children to the Mansion:

I had my children under Dr Clarke there. He vaccinated them. We used to take them there on the bus. My first baby was born in 1916. And yes - you took the children there and they used to take their teeth out and see to them all. They used to bring a little hunchback, George West his name was, and that little hunchback, he was always with Dr. Clarke. Dr. Clarke took him as a little boy of fourteen to look after him really.

Mrs Mace also remembers George West:

I can even remember the little man there. He was a very nice little man, well dressed and that, must have been a clerk or something. And he had a hunchback, long legs and a small body and he was there donkey's years. He was even there after I got married and took my kids up there.

Mrs Brooking recalls that at about the same time there were:

About four or five (nurses) other than the (one) doctor.

Some years later Miss McDonnell was waiting on the first floor landing, to see the dentist:

There was a nurse there. I can remember how she was rather the sergeant-major type; and it was said that she used to drink. Whether this was true or not I don't know. But she was rather brutal so far as my memory goes. Well at one time when I went, I went into the dentist with the nurse and my mother lost the sleeve of her coat, because I was holding on to that. I actually pulled it right out of the top bit. So you can imagine, this was real dread. I think what you've got to understand is that nowadays there is really very little pain involved in anything ...

People had raging toothache and raging neuralgia. They would be actually devastated by the pain. You don't now... it was something that we live with. Anyway, we had the usual medical check-up at school, and I can remember one of the visits. I can remember coming to, hanging over the edge of the sink. Again, one of the recollections you see is blood. There always seemed to be blood involved in everything. Nowadays you don't see that, it's all rinsed away quickly at a dentists. In those days you were dribbling it out all over a sink somewhere or other. Or else it was all down the front of you.

But I can remember coming out. You hardly dared ever feel round inside your mouth and see what they'd done. I can remember getting outside Lloyd Park gates and putting my tongue round inside my mouth very gingerly, only to find that a tooth that should have been taken out was there. So I'd got to live with that and I'd got to go back again. It used to be said jokingly, that they (dentists) got paid by the number of teeth they took out. But of course there wasn't the same kind of treatment then, in trying to fill teeth or stop taking teeth out. It really was rather, just, you know, out come your teeth. You didn't, as you would do now, calmly go along and make an appointment and say 'Oh well, I'm coming to see you next week', you were normally in pain before you went, and quite some pain.

Mr Stanley Young had a lot of teeth taken out at Lloyd Park:

I should say about ten or eleven at the same time. I think they gave you gas. What with eating sweets,

and we didn't brush them like the kids do today. None of that. Oh no, they didn't seem to worry in the old days. They just lived and ate, but today it's all television and don't forget your children got less fillings, but they never had that did they?

And Mrs Simmonds recalls:

Of course they'd pull your teeth out, wouldn't fill them, pull them out. If there was a bad tooth they'd just pull it out.

Mr Taylor was separated from his mother, who was left outside while he went in to the dentist:

I was seen by a man and a woman in white coats who said, 'Sit in this chair'. And they jammed a large rubber wedge in my mouth.

It had a chain hanging on it with a smaller wedge on the other end. It was terribly painful. They said 'We are going to put this rubber mask over your face, and when we take it away it will have drawn all your teeth out and you won't feel a thing'. I can remember this large rubber mask advancing over my face and I was absolutely terrified. I can then remember seeing it being removed and the man's hand with what looked like a pair of pliers going into my mouth, the excruciating pain as he pulled the tooth out, and the blood spurting out of my mouth, as he removed it. I can't remember how many were taken out, whether I had been unconscious and they'd taken teeth out and they'd given me another whiff because I was coming round and then took the last one out. But I was fully conscious when that one was taken out. The wedge had been taken out by this time and I was taken from the chair into what I presume was the recovery room, where there were two or three basins on the wall. Another boy was sitting there, crying and bleeding as I was. We were then taken down to our mothers, after we had washed our mouth out. The tradition was, you clapped a handkerchief over your mouth to keep the cold and disease out. I was led home in tears.

The effect was so traumatic that I didn't go to the dentist for over twenty years. I was absolutely terrified.

Miss McDonnell tried to avoid going to the dentist sometimes:

I think often, we'd wiggle as many teeth out as we could on our own, I mean it was quite true that people put a piece of string round or put a piece of cotton round the doorknob. And I can remember sitting down, behind the armchair - I always used to get round behind a big, old armchair when there was anything wiggling away at a tooth in the hope that I might get that loose and get rid of it myself, without having to go to the dentist.

While Mrs Ayres went the dental clinic at Lloyd Park regularly:

We'd be sent along from school. Actually, their dental check-ups were more regular than they are now. My children can sometimes go three years without a dental check-up. But there you used to have them every year. I mean they were very regular. And you would meet children from the other schools.

As I say, it was Lloyd Park Mansion then, but they were very good. And of course there was always a walk round the duck pond afterwards. It was quite a pleasant place to go to. But even then, it was a lot more frightening than the dentists are now. I mean, they didn't bother hiding anything. There was a nurse there holding your hands and somebody else clapping a rubber mask over your face, whereas now, they do it all from behind and talk to you while they are doing it, and you don't see anything. Miss McDonnell compared the dental treatment at Lloyd Park with that she found elsewhere. In fact, it wasn't until I was evacuated during the (second world) war and I was in Norfolk, in Thetford, which in those days, of course, was very much a country district - it wasn't built up as it is

now, and the dentist visited the school in a caravan. Now we were sharing a school with other children. I was down to have I think, two teeth out. Of course there was nothing I could do about it. I had to put a brave face on. It was high school by then, I mean I was thirteen, I was supposed to be grown up. And I can remember having a rubber bib round me and a mug of toothwash in my hand, having to walk across the playground, the boy's playground, to the surgery. I can remember sitting in that chair, and the dentist saying to me 'come on, I've finished', and I couldn't believe him. 'You can go'. I just would not believe him because it hadn't hurt as it used to hurt. There was nothing to it and I just couldn't get over it. There was a teacher on duty and she said 'come on', you know 'go back'. I just couldn't believe that it was possible; that you could go and have a tooth out without really suffering very much.

But returning to Lloyd Park, Mrs May Williams recalls that:

People would nudge one another in school and say 'so and so's going up about her teeth tomorrow'. If we'd got out of school and this girl wasn't back, we'd fly up to the Park and watch from downstairs, just inside the railings, at all the kiddies having their teeth done in the front of the hall. But towards the end, I think they moved to a room at the back where other children couldn't stand and watch.

Fortunately, my mother used to make me clean my teeth after every meal. A lot of kiddies I don't think, ever cleaned their teeth. My mother was one for 'have an apple after your dinner and then clean your teeth'. My mother was very particular about health.

Mr Taylor couldn't remember anybody having a filling:

I can't recall anybody having a filling. There were lots of children with gaps in their mouths and that was the accepted thing at school, because when we were young the teeth tended to move about still. So they found their own level. If you had two or three out the others sort of spread out about your mouth. My parents were quite keen on hygiene, my father had been a prisoner of war in the First World War and lived in some appalling conditions in Germany. So he was very keen on keeping everybody clean. But we didn't always use toothpaste. In fact we didn't use toothpaste at all. We had 'Eucryl Toothpowder' mainly. But if we ran out of that, which was frequently, then we used salt. You got salt on your toothbrush, you brushed your teeth and rinsed. My father reckoned it was the next best thing to 'Eucryl'.

A lot of kids didn't clean their teeth at all. It was fairly common to see children with yellow teeth. You relied on what you ate. In the area where I lived in Walthamstow, it was a relatively poor area, and diet was fairly limited to what could be afforded. In my home generally, we had good protein. My father insisted on us eating meat and we ate what vegetables were available at the time. We didn't have a lot of sweet things.

We rarely had more than the main course to eat. We may have got fruit occasionally, very rarely did we get sweets. I used to get a halfpenny a week pocket money, with which I would get sweets if I wanted, or save it towards my holiday. If I did buy sweets it was 'Tom Thumb Mixture' because you got hundreds of these in a bag for a halfpenny, and they used to last quite a long time... tiny little balls of sugar.

Lloyd Park Mansion also arranged for tonsils to be removed. Mrs Brooking remembers that:

In those days doctors used to take tonsils out in the house, in your own houses, if you had your own private doctor. I know that was done, because I know children that had had it done. Yes, they used to do tonsils. But you used to come out and, you know, they used just to be hiked out, you used to come out and that was that.

In Mrs Ayres case:

I was in [Chingford Hospital with diphtheria and scarlet fever] for nearly nine weeks and then I came home and we had to go to the Town Hall, no not the Town Hall, the Lloyd Park Mansion as it was then, which is now the Water House, for the clinic. That was to check if I was ready to go back to school. And of course my throat was still sore, and that's why my mother couldn't believe that I had got tonsillitis. Mind you, there were hundreds of children there, there were children everywhere, and I suppose, you know, they had a quick look and said 'yes'. And removal of tonsils was very, very popular at the time.

They don't take them out now, unless it's really necessary, but they thought that they weren't any use and to them it was like taking your tooth out. They [Lloyd Park Mansion] gave mother a letter to go to this place on Hoe Street. They said 'Oh yes, they were quite sure what it was' and gave her a letter for me to go there. But it was just like going to the dentist and having your tooth out, you had a rest and then you were out in an hour. It's like giving blood almost. In fact I think they are more careful giving blood, because you get a cup of tea and they come round and keep making sure you are all right. But they regarded it as that sort of operation. I don't think it was that hygienic. I mean, now they put you in a gown and they give you a pre-med, and everything's sterile.

Mrs Ayres was taken to somewhere near the Rose and Crown in Hoe Street:

It was a shop, an ordinary shop-front, and we went in, and I was taken straight away from my mother there, and put in this waiting-room - which was, I suppose, it was the back parlour of the shop really. And I was next to an electric fire (you know those old electric fires, which had a sort of wire thing). It was burning my leg. I was trying to move and there was quite a big lady next to me, and you know, I didn't know what to say, and I was quite relieved, but when they came and got me, it was just like a kitchen table in the kitchen part of the house at the back. And you know, I got up on the table, there was a light and somebody clapped a mask over my face, just like they did when you were having your teeth out. And when I woke up, I was in a sort of long room with beds along, and there was a little boy in the next bed to me and I mean, it was very sore and I was talking to him and he stopped talking and I knew that he'd died, and it turned out afterwards that he had. He was eight.

And anyway, after an hour, my mother took me home, wrapped me up in a blanket and took me home in the pushchair, and the next day I was very ill. And it turned out that instead of this stuff coming away, I'd swallowed it all. And they sent for Dr Powell, who was the local Medical Officer, and he got Dr Anthony in, he was our doctor afterwards, and somebody else. And there were three doctors and they locked the door in the bedroom, and they decided they couldn't give me an anaesthetic because I was too weak, and they used a stomach pump, I found out afterwards, it was. And they had to cut round the inside... I can still remember trying to scream because they were cutting with some scissors and cotton wool, I suppose it was to get this thing in, you know. And I was very ill for months, I couldn't eat anything for months afterwards. I was very lucky to survive it.

There was no way they could have moved me, they came to the house and they came back every day. They were very careful afterwards. Mother didn't have to pay for the doctor coming in then. Usually you did. Well I think they were probably very worried because they had said I had got to have it done, and it was quite obvious that I shouldn't have had it done, because diphtheria's in your throat and nobody in their right mind would think ... I mean now they look in horror at doing anything after an illness like that, they wait until you're (better)... They won't give you an injection even.

Miss Waterton was taken to Lloyd Park Mansion with a scab on her nose:

My mother couldn't heal it (the scab) came right down one side. Mother took me to Lloyd Park and Dr Clarke took a swab. He said he would let my mother know as soon as he got the report, and he came

up to my mother on the Sunday morning to report that I'd got diphtheria in a very bad form. It was just my nose and ears, not my throat at all.

Mrs Young had a sore throat and was sent from Lloyd Park to Chingford Isolation Hospital:

My brother was queer and it was suspected he'd got scarlet fever, and of course there was seven of us kids running around, all under the age of ten. I know mother had only gone up the shops, which were a couple of yards away, when the doctor came. We were all running around upstairs, including the one who was ill, and of course the doctor sent for the ambulance straight away. Well after that the rest of us had to go to Lloyd Park, which was our clinic (we used to call it Lloyd Park Mansion then) for throat swabs. I often had sore throats. I did have a sore throat, but apart from that, there was nothing wrong with me and of course my swab was useless. And I can remember the doctor saying 'she's got a dirty throat', and they called for an ambulance. I wasn't allowed to go home.

They fetched the ambulance there. They took me to where I used to live, I lived at Warwick Road at the time, and my mother was allowed to come to the ambulance door, I was not allowed out and I know I started crying, saying the doctor said I hadn't washed my neck. That was my interpretation of a dirty neck. And from there I went straight to Chingford Hospital.

Mrs Ayres caught diphtheria from school:

I remember I was at Queen's Road Infants School and I'd just started. And the teacher thought I wasn't very well, and I can remember being brought home, which wasn't very far. And then an ambulance came and I was wrapped in a bright red blanket and carried up to the ambulance. I can remember not wanting to leave my mother, and, you know, sort of being snatched away. And then we stopped up in Edinburgh Road and it picked up another little boy called Kenny - I know his name - and he had diphtheria.

They had an epidemic there already, before I started apparently. And I ... and the child I was sitting next to when I first went, had been ... I'm sure I saw them in there, that's right. They were in there when I got in there. So, three weeks afterwards I went down with it. It was just unfortunate that I should have been sitting next ... cause the desks then were, you know, in two's all the way up.

For Mrs Toogood:

I went in, in 1934. What happened was that I went to Guide camp and one of the girls complained about a sore throat. She had got diphtheria and she gave it to two of us. So there was three of us in there ...

While in Mrs Pettifer's case:

My sister, when they sent her home, they could not have isolated her properly or sent her out too soon, and I caught the germ.

And for Mrs Pettifer's son:

when he was about four or five, he hadn't been at school a month, before he had caught it.

However, Mrs Ayres had two other scares as well:

Well, my sister, they thought she had ... Oh, it was terrible ... it was one Bank Holiday Monday. And she had a sore throat, and we had an emergency doctor, and he said she'd got diphtheria. And they whipped her off to Chingford Sanatorium, and we had to go to Lloyd Park Mansion, my brother and I

to have an injection. This was after, I mean a long time after I'd had it, to have an injection. And we both passed out, because we were both the sort that passed out if a needle came towards you. And my brother said to me 'I'll be all right, we'll get three weeks off school now you see, if she's got diphtheria'. And it turned out she hadn't got it at all. And she had to stay in Chingford Sanatorium for three weeks, in the isolation part. And we had to go back to school on the next day, because you only had one day off for Bank Holidays, so we'd wasted a whole day.

Well I remember when I developed diphtheria, I was in a scarlet fever ward. When I developed diphtheria I remember being wrapped in a blanket and being taken out in the middle of the night. Well it was dark, it might have been seven o'clock, but I thought it was the middle of the night, and quite a long way (and it was cold), to another ward.

For small children the effects of admission to hospital were traumatic sometimes for unexpected reasons.

Mrs Pettifer:

And I was very sick, well the nurse said 'You ought to have your hair cut'. I said 'Oh no', because often those days, fever would upset your hearing or your throat and your hair. And I said 'Oh no, I'm not having my hair cut' ... because I was courting then, I was eighteen, and in those days if you had your hair cut, you had fleas... so that I didn't have it cut, and it's never been the same since!

Mrs Ayres:

And I remember them taking us to the Hospital. I wasn't very happy about it naturally, although I felt ill. I can remember vividly, they tried to make me drink cocoa, and I didn't like milk. And I remember, it was quite a fight, you know, and I tried to explain to them, my father always gave me hot lemon, which is what I did drink.

Mrs Toogood remembers vividly the routine of life in Chingford isolation Hospital:

The routine of the (Chingford Isolation) hospital, was that when the ambulance got to the lodge, the doctor arrived and he gave you what was called an anti-toxin injection. Then you were taken to the ward. You had to wear hospital clothes and you were laid absolutely flat without a pillow for three or four days. You didn't have anything to eat on the first day. The second day they gave you some sort of boiled fish.

Most of the dinners were either fish or mince, because everybody was in bed most of the time. They had those feeding cups which look like little tea-cups, so that you could drink.

After about three days, you got one pillow, then after three more days you got two pillows. After three or four more days, if the matron thought you were well enough, you sat up. After a couple of weeks you could get up. They used to wake us at about seven o'clock in the morning. They'd come round with bed pans, and they'd wash us and take temperatures. They'd get breakfast and then the day staff would come on and make the beds.

They used to come round every evening to take our temperatures. Then the question 'have you had a mark today?' That meant had you had a bowel action. The first day you said no, you'd get some senna tea in a feeding cup that's horrible! The second day, the same again, The third day you had to have an enema. That was the routine.

For Mrs Ayres it was the quality of the food that left its mark on her memory:

The food...I can still remember it. I've never touched watery food since. I don't even have gravy on my dinner because ... it used to be water with mince in. Everyday it was water with mince in, you know. And it was horrible, I can still remember how horrible it was.

Mrs Toogood can remember a little more of the detail of the food in the ward:

We used to have bread and butter and cereal for breakfast - I think we used to have porridge sometimes. And then there was mince or something similar for dinner. And bread and butter and cake for tea.

When we got up we used to have our meals in the boys' part of the ward because there wasn't room in the girls'. The boys' ward hadn't anything like that, so they had a big table and you could go and sit round that when you were up. That didn't please us very much really, because there were one or two boys in there who were a bit badly behaved. They had one from a children's home. When he had finished his dinner, he would pick up his plate and lick it. Perhaps he wasn't used to such good food, I don't know.

At about seven o'clock the night nurses would come on and they'd give us a milky drink and bread and dripping or something like that. Then they'd settle us down.

Nurses in the isolation hospitals took the place of parents, with mixed reactions from the children.

Miss Fennell was a nurse in an isolation hospital, though not in the Waltham Forest area, and recalls what routine was like for her:

I was on the fever ward and you had to put on an infectious gown, and we had to wash our hands before we touched any baby. When I was on my own one night, on duty on the scarlet fever ward, and you had to give these injections of penicillin, and it wasn't all ready for you, you had to make it up, you know.

And I took charge of that ward. The Matron used to come round of course. And when she came round you had to keep the children quiet.

At Chingford, Mrs Ayres saw this rather differently:

They didn't pander to patients like they do now. I can remember the nurses were very ... one of them was very strict. And I thought she was really nasty. And I always remember thinking 'when I grow up I was going to see her', you know. Course, she was probably an old lady by then.

I remember the Sister was quite kind, but the nurses were quite rough. I don't think they were there because of dedication. I think it was a job, and I think the children were a bit of a nuisance really ... you know.

At Leyton, Mrs Pettifer had a happier time:

But I do remember we had a lovely nurse there, a Nurse Black, and she told me the thing that horrified her more than anything was having a nail removed ... anybody's nail. Funny wasn't it, just shows you what some people, you know, dislike intensely or upsets them.

And Mrs Toogood remembers:

The nurses were very kind. The doctors seemed all right, but of course they always had a retinue and were treated very much like gods. Nobody said 'nay' to them. But the Sister was a bit strict. She kept

her eye on the nurses, though the night sisters were always very nice. Most of the nurses were young Irish girls and they were lovely, they looked after us. if you had any worries they'd sit by your bed until you were asleep and that sort of thing.

Everything had to be absolutely spick and span for Sister coming on. That was bad enough, but every day at about eleven o'clock it was Matron's round. My goodness, you had to lie to attention for the Matron! She was really someone of importance. And if the doctor came on the nurses hardly dare breathe because he was so important.

Because of the strict isolation there was not normally any contact between the young patients and their parental family. But children knew when to expect some contact.

First Mrs Toogood:

We knew on Sunday that they (our families) would be coming to bring books or something like that, and they'd be at the gate. So when the nurses weren't looking we'd nip out and stand by the window and wave like mad.

Mrs Pettifer remembers this too:

And we were never allowed visitors, not at all. People used to bring boxes and stand outside the corrugated railing. People, mothers and fathers used to stand outside to see their children over the corrugated fence you see. And sometimes they used to throw delicacies or anything over there you see.

Well, when we went to look it was the end of the world to us because he had gone in hospital, first one, and we didn't know him. I said 'Daddy, where's Bob, I can't see him anywhere'. And so a lady next, she said 'who do you want?' I said 'Bob Pettifer'. 'There he is', she said. And you know, he had a girl's jumper on, a green velvet jumper that came down to his knees. And he was as fat as butter ... he'd put so much on ... he was a little pudding. I, we, didn't recognise him. Funny isn't it - oh dear, oh dear.

And he thought when he got it and he was going away, his grandfather, cause he was the people we lived with, my husband's people, he was very strict, a very religious man, he wouldn't like him having comics or anything like that. But when he said 'Oh well, we'll send you comics' ... Bob, he wasn't silly, he thought 'something's up'.

Mrs Ayres had much the same sort of experience when she was in hospital.

And of course you never saw your mother and father. They were only allowed as far as the gate. And having diphtheria and scarlet fever together...my name was on the gate, on the danger list.

They used to put up a list of people on the danger list and my father used to come up on a Sunday morning. And you could only get a bus ... or tram I suppose it was, as far as the Mount. You had to walk from the Mount up to the Royal Forest Hotel. And they used to have a Roundabout up there and I was always envious because my sister and brother used to go with him and they used to have a ride on this, and of course, I never did see it, cause I was in the Hospital.

But they used to leave things at the gate for me, every Sunday morning. And they used to leave a list in it. And I couldn't read, but I used to get somebody to read it out to me what was on the list, because I, you know ... everybody knew that some of those things went missing.

They could only send toys that could be destroyed because you couldn't bring anything out at all. They used to leave fruit, bananas and things, you didn't get that sort of thing unless it was sent in. And

sweets. They used to leave all sorts of parcels, you know.

But for those on the danger list, special permission could be given for visits.

In Mrs May Williams case:

When I was born, my youngest brother (who was then fifteen years old) was in Chingford Hospital with scarlet fever and we nearly lost him. They came up to my mother and they told her she could go and see him. She had to walk up there, there were no trams, they had finished for the night. They let her stop ten minutes and she had to walk back, and about three weeks later I was born! She a white gown and a mask over her face. Well, he was very ill.

For Miss Waterton:

I was in the hospital for seventeen weeks. I can remember my mother coming in, you see the thing was, they were afraid of paralysis of the brain. My mother used to put on this white gown and a hood all in one.

And Mr de Courcy had much the same experience:

I can remember my brother and sister being in there with diphtheria, you weren't allowed to go inside the gate, except with special permission. You had to get permission from the doctor in the hospital to see the patient. And when you saw the patient, you saw them behind protective glass, a shield, so there was no fear of you getting any of the germs.

But there were also special ways and means, or so Mrs Toogood found!

My elder brother worked for Walthamstow Council and any one of the workmen that were around - the window cleaners and the men who came to bury people - used to come up and say 'Hello'.

But not all that was meant to go to the children always got through to them. Mrs Ayres on the position (as she saw it) at Chingford:

No, I knew they left food for us, for me, because it was always on the list they sent of what they'd left at the gate - because you had to leave everything at the gate with your name on it. And if you found that you hadn't got what was on the list ... I can remember sort of, although I was only five, saying 'my daddy said I had a so and so and I haven't got a banana' and then it would miraculously appear from somewhere. I think they were probably very poorly paid, because half the stuff that came in used to go missing.

Part of the treatment in hospital was complete rest to avoid strain on other parts of the body and in particular the heart. Though relieved to some extent by gifts from home, life in isolation was unexciting for the young Mrs Young and Mrs Ayres:

The ward took scarlet fever and diphtheria cases. They were the two. The two women sitting up, they didn't seem very ill, but some of the children just lay there all the time.

They did eventually let me get up. I was so bored and there used to be these taps on the outside walls and I used to clean them morning and night. I was then allowed out of the cubicles for a bit, but I wasn't allowed to go into the other cubicles. I wasn't allowed out too much, these taps were this end, and at the back of one of the cubicles was empty.

But it seemed a terrible long time. It was nearly nine weeks. And I can remember it going on and on. And there was nobody to turn to, there was nobody you could tell or, you know, if something

upset you there was nobody that ... I can remember doing things to get back at them if I thought they were being nasty. They had huge blinds at the windows and I remember somebody saying to me 'Let it go' and I remember leaning over and it went like a pistol shot. You know, we all put the clothes over our heads.

Mind you, it was a lovely place really, because I remember the grounds being wild, like, the grass was very long and you could hide in it. Cause they came to call you, you know, when we were up and a bit better, they came to call you, you could hide ... pretend you weren't there.. But it was a very nice location for it.

Mrs Toogood played outside:

We were allowed to go out into the grounds when it was nice. I remember one time we played cricket, but they kept an eye on us naturally.

Miss Waterton too played outside when on the mend:

When I was starting to get better, I was able to go out and run around. I think I went in, in the November and came out in the April. We used to run round the block and snow was on the ground. Then after some weeks you were discharged and sent home.

But really, what struck me was that the children, when they got out of bed, they couldn't walk. And I remember lying there thinking, well I can run fast, you know. And when I got out of bed I passed out completely, I couldn't walk either. Even when I came home I had to go about in a push-chair because ... you know.

I was very lucky because usually you were left with something with diphtheria, all sorts of funny things. Like, somebody I know had fallen arches after diphtheria. And well almost invariably you were left with some weakness in the heart ' because it was like rheumatic fever I suppose, And when I went for Civil Service medicals, they used to do all the bending and touching your toes and things, and then ask you what illnesses you'd had. And the minute you said 'I had scarlet fever and diphtheria,' they'd start all over again, and instead of touch your toes five times, touch them ten times, to make sure that ... um.

But no, I didn't have any after effects at all.

But with some mixed feelings:

At the end of six weeks my brother and I were discharged. There was no follow-up done by the hospital. The silly thing was, I never had diphtheria in the first place.

Mrs Ayres had her own version:

It was if you passed a drain. You'd say 'Touch your collar, never swallow'. But it was mostly when the ambulances went by, people knew they were fever ambulances. All the children used to say 'Touch your collar, never swallow, never catch the fever'... But everybody did it, it was like touching wood. But it was for an ambulance, directly you saw the ambulance.