



COMMUNITY HOSPITALS

– THE MODEL OF CARE NYE BEVAN ADMIRERD

The Eminent historian, Dr John Davies, in the TV series 'Wales: Power and the People', on BBC One Wales, quoted Nye Bevan as saying. "All I am doing is extending to the entire population of Britain the benefits we had in Tredegar for a generation or more. We are going to 'Tredegar-ise' you". Such were Nye Bevan's thoughts as he launched his plans for a UK National Health Service.

As the NHS celebrates its 72nd birthday and the Community Hospitals Association prepares to celebrate its half century, it is germane to remember that the local community hospital, easy to access, providing a wide range of services, supported by committed local residents and hence indisputably meeting local needs, was the model that Nye Bevan admired.

After all, Aneurin Bevan, the founder of the National Health Service, had become a member of the Tredegar Cottage Hospital Management Committee around 1928 and was its chairman between 1929 and 1930.



Tredegar Cottage Hospital

The image that is sometimes projected of a Britain having a primitive healthcare service prior to the National Health Service in 1948 is inaccurate, at least it certainly was in Wales. Throughout the principality there was a substantial network of community hospitals supported by a number of more specialised infirmaries for major interventions. After the Great War, large numbers of communities had invested in a 'memorial hospital' to care for their communities.

In South Wales, these community hospitals were largely funded by a weekly levy on workers' pay: Contributions were regular and healthcare standards were good. Not far from Tredegar, the community hospital in Mountain Ash received a visit from HRH Princess Elizabeth.

In 1946, after the Second World War, Mountain Ash was the principle culture venue in South Wales with a 5,000 seater pavilion which had escaped the wartime bombs. The Welsh National Eisteddfod

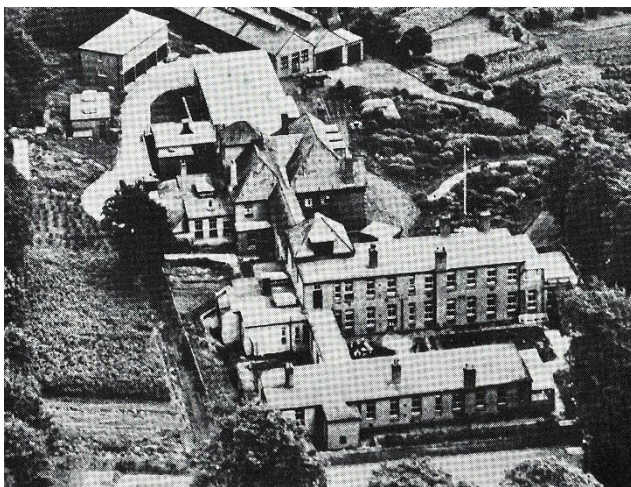


was held in the town that year and it was the occasion for the Heir to the Throne to be welcomed into the Welsh 'Gorsedd of Bards'.



The Gorsedd druidic circle was adjacent to Mountain Ash Community Hospital. Not only did Princess Elizabeth visit the hospital, the Royal Party was given use of a clinic suite for resting and refreshment during their visit to the Eisteddfod. Princess Elizabeth thanked the staff of the community hospital for the care they took of the vulnerable, their actions to relieve pain and their readiness at all time to respond to the needs of the sick and injured.

Three months after Princess Elizabeth visited Mountain Ash Community Hospital, the National Health Service Act 1946 received its Royal Assent. On Coronation Day, nearly 7 years later, many Mountain Ash hospital staff remembered meeting Her Royal Highness in August 1946.

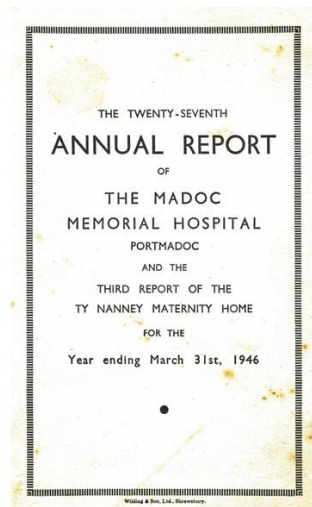


Mountain Ash Community Hospital in the 1950s



In 1946, their Community Hospital was the proud pride of many localities in North Wales also. A few years ago, I was asked to call on a lady, well into her nineties, who had been a district nurse in Porthmadog in 1946. She wanted me to have one of her treasured possessions, a copy of the "Annual Report of the Madoc Memorial Hospital of 1946".

The Report stated, "For 27 years the Madoc Memorial Hospital has made a real contribution to the health services of this district. The inhabitants have consistently shown their appreciation by giving the institution their most loyal support. This is as it should be for a hospital, which has always been owned by the people, managed by the people and run by the people".



Nye Bevan was the Minister of Health and Housing in the Attlee Government from 1945. He would have approved of the words in the Madoc Hospital Annual Report and the sentiments of my elderly district nurse, who had cherished the values of her community hospital for so long.

As a young man, I was personally acquainted with Mr Nye Bevan. I went with my father to the house he used in the Ebbw Vale constituency on a couple of occasions and to lots of meetings and rallies that Mr Bevan spoke at. Mr Bevan was passionate about hospitals and the support they received from their communities. He was always addressed as Mr Bevan.

If Mr Bevan were alive today, he would have been a strong supporter of the Community Hospitals Association and proud to congratulate it on its 50 years anniversary. He would also have seen the need for it to continue to defend the principles of the NHS, health services locally accessible with quality care for all.



Nantyglo community hospital

I remember attending a meeting in 1955 when Mr Bevan was planning to stand to be elected Treasurer of the Labour Party. A meeting was called in Cwm, near Ebbw Vale, to help organise his campaign. During the meeting one man confronted Mr Bevan that his very sick neighbour had not been admitted to Ebbw Vale community hospital, a couple of miles away, although there were empty beds there. "They have sent my neighbour to Nantyglo hospital, seven miles away, because they do not want to spend money on nurses in Ebbw Vale", he complained. "My neighbour is very ill and it is difficult for his wife to get to Nantyglo to visit him", he added.

Mr Bevan told him that Mr Anthony Eden was now Prime Minister, and that Mr Eden's philosophy was "putting finance before patients". Tredegarising the country had been a great achievement, "but to keep it we have to fight for it". "The NHS will last, but only as long as there are folk left with the faith to fight for it".

Constructively, the Community Hospitals Association has spent 50 years supporting the quality of care in individual community hospitals, by conducting research into service delivery in community hospitals, by helping hospitals improve their practice, by disseminating research findings and by assisting communities with their local campaigns to improve their local health services.

Nye Bevan would have fully supported those objectives and have congratulated the Community Hospitals Association today on its half century of achievement.

Tom Brooks

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