

NURSING IN GLOUCESTER INFIRMARY 1755 - 1865

On 10 October 1754 the first meeting took place of "the Nobility, Gentry and Clergy of the County at The Tolsey to start a subscription and endow the Gloucester Infirmary". As a result many Gloucester worthies paid a subscription that was to make them Governors of the proposed Infirmary with the right to attend the quarterly General Meeting and to be elected to serve on the Weekly Board that was to meet every Thursday at noon to order the day running of the Institution.

A set of rules was made very quickly and one stated that all the proceedings of the General Court and the Weekly Board "shall be fairly registered in a proper book for that purpose". From these 'proper books' together with the annual reports published for the benefit of all subscribers can be gleaned much information about life in Gloucester during this period but primarily about the Institution, the sick poor for whom it existed and for all the staff who cared for them. References to nurses are frequent and enlightening giving many glimpses of their role and their place in society in the 18th and 19th centuries and also of their patients. Indeed an account first of the role of the patient may do much to clarify the role of the nurse at that time.

The patient's admission and stay in the Infirmary were governed by very strict rules. He must be curable and clean, polite, obedient, grateful and such patients who were able had to be ready to "assist the nurses and other servants in nursing the patients, washing and ironing the linen, washing and cleaning the wards and in doing such other business as the Matron shall require".

On 30 October 1777 there was a complaint against the patients of Berkeley Ward "that they refused to assist in making their beds in the proper time and in cleaning the ward altho' ordered so to do by the nurse and afterwards by the Matron. Upon which the Governors present at this Board visited the ward, reproved the patients and admonished them to behave better for the future on pain of dismissal.

In 1807 there was no water in the wards because "No patient was able to work the pump". If he "behaved unseemly", used "insolent language", was caught smoking, even had extra bread "secreted in" to him or even failed to be cured in the time allowed he was discharged and often blacklisted so that he could not be admitted again. The official time allowed for a 'cure' varied from six weeks to three months depending on the financial state of the Institution which after the first few years was always precarious. However the Weekly Board was often appealed to and extended the stay if there was a hope of a cure and occasionally it was drawn to the Board's attention that someone had managed to stay for a year or more in spite of their vigilance.

It was required that "Patients who are hale and the Nurses and other Servants who can be spared from the necessary business of the House do constantly attend daily prayers, that they do not swear or curse or give abusive language or behave themselves

indecently in other way on pain of expulsion if they dont amend after the first admonition". No liquors or provisions of any sort were to be brought into the House to the patients from their friends or any other whatsoever. Visitors were allowed every Monday and Saturday from three to four thirty. Patients had to have permission to leave the infirmary and on no account could they stay out over night. No patient could stay up later than 9pm in winter and 10pm in summer and if fit had to be up by 7am in summer and 8am in winter.

All in-patients were expected to bring with them "three shirts or shifts and other necessary apparel" and it was a rule over which the Board frequently had problems they often had to appeal to the Poor Law Guardians or other sponsor who had sent the patient in for these to be supplied urgently. Though on one occasion a generous gift by the Blue Coat School meant that all the patients had night caps provided.

Patients were not allowed to have newspapers to read because it was feared they would breed discontent and "No patient was to play cards, dice or any other game or to smoke in the wards or elsewhere". The Board was however very concerned that they made good use of their time and regular sums of money were set aside to buy simple religious books and tracts and several times the chaplain was granted money for a supply of spelling books to help those who could not read or write.

Finally "No woman big with child, no children under seven years of age, no persons disordered in their senses or suspected to have the smallpox, itch or other infectious distemper or who are not clean and free from vermin nor any who are apprehended to be in a consumptive or dying state or who are suspected to have venereal disease or who may receive equal benefit as outpatients be admitted into the Infirmary or permitted to stay in it. But exceptions to this rule are made in cases of sudden accident and other emergencies." Most of these rules were broken many times and they were often subjects for discussion by the Weekly Board.

The cost of the patents' food was an endless topic of discussion by the Board particularly as the price of food rose rapidly early in the 19th century, but the normal diet provided was very monotonous. In 1867 the patients had a weekly allowance of $\frac{1}{2}$ lb sugar and a daily allowance of 20oz of bread.

Breakfast	8am:	$\frac{3}{4}$ pint tea. 2oz milk. $\frac{1}{2}$ oz butter
Dinner	1pm:	
Sunday:		4oz cold roast beef or mutton and 6oz potatoes
Monday & Thursday:		4oz warm boiled beef or mutton and 6oz potatoes
Tuesday & Friday:		1 pint broth with vegetables and 4oz rice
Wednesday & Saturday		4oz warm roast beef or mutton and 6oz potatoes
Tea	5pm:	As breakfast
Supper	8.30pm:	$\frac{1}{2}$ pint oatmeal porridge made with milk and on Tuesdays and Fridays 1oz cheese.

In December 1758 there was a complaint against the broth and the matron was ordered to allow three pounds of meat extraordinary to each gallon of broth. Special diets and any extras had to be specially ordered by the physician and at times of great financial stringency as in 1867 matron had to keep a careful record of all these in a special book which she had to bring to the Weekly Board for them to see. The hospital actually kept its own cows to supply the milk right through this period. The cost of keeping a patient was £13 per annum in the 1790s but by the 1870s it had risen to £61.

One reason for this increase was the gradual rise in the pay of the matron and nurses. When the infirmary first opened in the Crown and Sceptre Inn, Westgate Street, in 1755 the matron received £20 per annum and the nurses, one to each ward, £4. At the Quarterly Meeting in October 1855 it was reported that "The day nurses are at present admitted at £12. 12s. for the first year but if they remain a whole year they receive a gratuity of £2. 2s. 0d" (that is if they had behaved themselves and there had been no complaints proved against them). It was resolved at this meeting that at the end of the 2nd year there be another increase of £1. 1s. 0d. and at the end of the 3rd year another increase of £1. 1s. 0d. making the wages of £16. 16s. 0d. for every nurse who stayed that long. At the same time matron's was increased from £50 to £60. In the 1850s the first annuity for those retiring after several years of faithful service was proposed and on 1 February 1854 Anne Ferrabee the nurse on Ward No 1 appealed for "some pecuniary assistance upon her resignation after 23 years service". The General Quarterly Meeting turned the request down with regret because "in the past year expenses had exceeded income by above £70". Hope was expressed that it would be possible to adopt some scheme "if the circumstances of the Institution improve". That the type of person who worked as a nurse in the infirmary was barely above those who were eligible for poor law relief is indicated by an incident concerning another elderly nurse in 1824-5. In the August Sophia Wood lost the use of her arm and could no longer carry out her duties. "Poor and destitute" she asked to live in the Infirmary and the General Court gave their permission but applied to the Gloucester Workhouse Guardians for an allowance towards her support and maintainance. The guardians denied responsibility because she had "slept in the county of Littlethorpe", presumably the Gloucester suburb of Littleworth outside the city. The General Court then applied to the overseers and in February 1825 they allowed her 1s.0d. per week over which the general court expressed satisfaction.

She lived on until 3 May 1838 when she was transferred to the "Gloucester Poorhouse Infirmary because she has become perfectly imbecile". She died on 9 August and the Weekly Board defrayed the cost of her funeral.

It was not until 1862 that regular leave of absence was allowed, one week per year but only at matron's discretion and it was 1862 before regular off duty was considered necessary, apart from the traditional Sunday afternoon of the servant but only after considerable discussion. On 19 September the nurses asked for permission to be out one fixed afternoon and one fixed evening each week. After conferring with the house surgeon the Board

could not accede to the request as it would interfere with arrangements for in-patients. But on 26 September Mr. Cole the house surgeon reported to the Committee that after conferring with the nurses he was inclined to make the following arrangements "That they are to be allowed to be absent on one afternoon from 3-5 every week and on a separate evening from 6-8 but it was considered that it would be better to enquire whether Nurses were permitted to be absent on leave from other hospitals after 6pm in the Winter". Enquiries were made of Reading, Bristol General, Birmingham, Worcester, Brighton and Hereford and on 10 October the nurses were called to the Weekly Board "and it was distinctly explained to them (information having been obtained from those other hospitals) that they are to be allowed out door exercise one afternoon per week from 3-5 and one evening per week from quarter to six to 8.30. Sunday afternoons as theretofore but they are not to absent themselves from their wards if in the opinion of the house surgeon or Matron the cases are of such severity that their wards cannot be left with safety. They were warned that they must be punctual in returning to the Hospital by 8.30."

Of course the nurse also received her full board. On the whole there was very little discussion by the Board on this matter though they dealt with general complaints about the quality of the meat or cheese being supplied. However for several years from the time it was first requested in 1848 there were discussions on whether the normal daily ale and beer allowance should be changed partially or wholly to tea and sugar. The final decision was made in 1867 when it was "resolved that a money payment be made to Nurses and Servants in lieu of the Ale and Beer". Nurses were to receive £3 each and "To have a present of the materials for a summer and winter dress annually if they have been in the service of the institution 6 months".

This was the first mention of any uniform being supplied to the nurses apart from 1778 when it was "Ordered that Matron do purchase a nightgown for the use of the nurses when they do sit up at night with patients". From the very first however the porter had a "coat, waistcoat, breeches, hat and scarlet stockings with a dark Rufaia Drab Frock and a leather apron" supplied.

The annual gratuity for "deserving nurses" was an important incentive to good behaviour but in spite of this the complaints against nurses who as we have already seen came from people bordering on the poor and destitute, were often recorded. Theft, unkindness, drunkenness, misconduct, indiscretion, neglect and "not doing their duty" were the most common. All complaints were carefully investigated by the Weekly Board and many were discovered to be unfounded but if not the nurse risked instant dismissal or if a first offender then a reprimand and loss of gratuity if she promised that it would not happen again. In 1759 it was ordered that "Jane Withington Nurse be expelled for taking money of patients" and in 1864 it was reported that "the nurse of No 2 ward had conveyed provisions into her ward for the use of a patient." She was reprimanded by the Board and informed that the practice was a violation of the rules of the house. On her expressing regret at her conduct the Board having regard to the short period she had been in the Hospital permitted her to continue a nurse of the establishment on her promise not to repeat the offence. The only letter of gratitude was recorded in 1856.

"I should be wanting in gratitude did I not also bear testimony to the kindness of my nurse and I must add I have always seen her exhibit the greatest patience and forbearance under circumstances most trying". More often the weekly entry just read as it did on 18 June 1835. "There was no report of misconduct by the Nurses and the patients are satisfied".

Like the patients during this period many rules were made to govern the behaviour of the matron and the nurses. "The Matron be unmarried and free from the burden of a family and that she take care of the household goods and furniture according to the inventory given to her and that she be ready to give an account thereof when required.

That she weigh and measure all the provisions and necessaries which come into the House and keep a daily account thereof to be given to the Weekly Board and never suffer any of them to be carried out. That she oversee the patients and servants and take care that the wards, chambers, beds, cloathes, linen and all other things within the Infirmary be kept neat and clean and for these ends all the patients and servants shall be submissive and obedient to her.

She shall superintend the conduct of the Nurses Servants and patients and shall keep a check upon the Beer and Ale consumed by the patients and the Establishment by noting in a book provided the quantities consumed daily and she shall keep the key of the Ale and Beer engines.

She shall report all cases of misbehaviour of the patients or Servants. She shall lay upon the table of each Weekly Board such books as she shall be required to keep in which are recorded the weekly orders and consumption of Bread, Meat and Beer. That she go into each ward every morning and evening and cause the name of all the patients to be called over and that she enter into a book the names of the patients who are absent at such times from their respective wards without her leave or who have in any other respect transgressed the rules of the Infirmary. That she take care of the keys of the House seeing that the doors are locked at nine in the evening and not opened before 7am from Michaelmas to Lady Day and before 6am from Lady Day to Michaelmas unless in cases of great emergency for the service of the patients.

The servants shall consist of one Nurse to each ward and two night nurses, one laboratory man, one or more porters, one cook and one kitchen maid one housemaid and one or more washerwomen.

The Nurses must clean their respective wards before seven in the morning from Lady Day to Michaelmas and before eight from Michaelmas to Lady Day, and that they serve up all the breakfasts within one hour after the wards are cleaned. The nurses shall report the misbehaviour of any patient to the Matron. No Nurse nor other servant shall leave the House without a ticket of leave from the Matron with the name of such nurse or servant inserted; nor be absent for a day or more without permission in such cases providing an approved substitute.

That the nurses and other servants be very diligent in complying with the order of the Matron and their other superiors and that they behave themselves with tenderness to the patients and with civility and respect to all".

On 3 November 1774 it was ordered that "for the future the nurses examine whether the patients are clean before they go to be examined by the gentlemen of the faculty", and on 29 December 1774 that "no nurse or servant do presume to take any gratuity or reward directly or indirectly of any patient or any of their friends on pain of expulsion." It was also ordered that the rules respecting the conduct of the nurses patients and servants be read over in all the wards by one appointed by the matron for that purpose.

Treatments were rarely mentioned though much can be surmised from the supplies and equipment ordered over the years. In 1755 poultice kettles to hold 3-4 quarts were ordered together with "a table to spread plasters on", and over the next hundred years such things as "2 doz pewter half pint basons for the patients to take their medicine in". "A copper boiler for herb tea". "Voiders, Bleeding porringers and a set of cupping instruments". "A sweating chair with chafing dish and steem pot". In 1864 came the first of a series of "electrical machines". No mention was made of their use but perhaps they were precursors of the equipment now used in the physiotherapy department. Trusses were a frequent item of expenditure as was the order for "two wooden legs to be provided upon the best terms", and "artificial armlets of the best possible construction ordered for a boy of 17 from Minchinhampton who had both hands amputated". In 1767 Dr. Lyons was "desired to procure some lemon juice for the use of the Infirmary" and thereafter it became a regular item of expenditure.

Although one of the rules for the patients was that they were clean "and free of vermin" by 1783 it was "ordered that Matron cause Six Bug Trapps to be used in every ward and other rooms at her discretion". This problem had to be dealt with frequently in the years that followed.

In 1838 the nurse in charge of ward 2 who also had charge of the bathroom "complained that she could not prepare sulphur baths except on special appointment days as it interfered with her other work so the nurses under whose care such patients were placed were ordered to prepare the Baths".

The application of leeches was a frequent treatment and an expensive one. On 26 February 1846 the Medical Board were asked to consider a more economical system of supply because the "amount spent on leeches in the course of the previous year appear to the Board to be very large". Leeches and carriage had cost the Infirmary £107. 2s. 8d. in the year yet the year's wage bill for 11 nurses was only £161. 14s. 0d. In the same year £55. 13s. 5d. was spent on calico, two, sponges, cotton wool and bandages and £30. 4s. 3d. on lard, lint and linseed meal.

One investigation carried out by the board which vindicated a nurse, Ann Williams, of a charge of ill treating a 3 year old admitted with severe burns mentioned the treatment of the "application of linament to the burns with a feather". In 1815 there was a mention of a new treatment of patients with Venereal Disease, "Mercury to induce salivation".

An investigation of another complaint against the treatment of a boy with a stone in the bladder states "certain treatment had been ordered to be applied internally through the rectum but this treatment was carried out by one or two men who were the boy's fellow patients and not by the nurse. One of the men said that they had a very sad and troublesome job with the application and the boy felt it severely". As a result of this the Board ordered "With regard to the administration of suppositories, such duties belong and are understood throughout the Infirmary to belong to the Nurses alone and no sanction can be given to the Nurse to leave her duties to be performed by a patient".

The problem of cleaning and laundering soiled and infected linen often vexed the Board and in 1871 they produced what must have been the very first nursing procedure in the Gloucester Infirmary. Directions to nurses as to the disinfecting of linen were printed and a copy given to each nurse. "All linen removed from patients suffering from fever or other infectious disease must be at once soaked in water containing in every two gallons one ounce of Condy's Red Fluid (Potassium Permanganate) for the space of 24 hours then rinsed in cold water and lastly exposed to the fresh air for the ensuing 12 hours".

When Mrs. Hester Partridge was appointed the first matron in 1755 it was resolved that "the Matron shall attend some public Infirmary where the Committee will decide for her instruction". In April she set out for Bristol Infirmary with "five guineas for her expenses" but by June she was back ordering "mops, brushes, brooms, Turnery and Earthen Ware". Any further suggestion that the Matron or Nurses should be trained for the job was not made in the records until 1864. Advertisements for staff were put in the local papers from the very beginning when on 23 January 1755 it was resolved that "An advertisement to the following effect be inserted in the Gloucester, Bristol and Worcester Journals to be continued for one month. 'Whereas an Infirmary is intended to be erected for the County and City of Gloucester. And as an Apothecary, a Secretary, a Matron and Nurses will be wanting all persons who are willing to undertake either of those offices may apply to the Committee who will sit on Thursday the 20th of this instant at the College Coffee House in Gloucester and on Thursday the fortnight following'". When the first patients were admitted in the August there were four nurses chosen from 13 applicants.

There was a constant turnover of nursing staff some staying many years and some only a month or two and advertisements continued to be inserted in the Gloucester Journal. Later ones indicated the type of person they were looking for as this one from February 1855.

"NURSE WANTED:

The Weekly Board will at 12 o'clock on Thursday next the 8th instant proceed to elect a nurse for one of the wards of the Institution. She must be active, middle aged, without incumbrances and able to read and write".

Then on 15 December 1864 Mr. Gambler Parry proposed to the Board "the admission into this hospital of young persons for the purpose of being trained as pupil nurses". Thus began a series of events that was to include a visit from Government Inspectors in 1865 who in their report said "The welfare of Patients in Hospitals depends in no small degree on the amount and kind of nursing they receive and no woman, however admirably adapted by nature to be a nurse she may be, can be an efficient nurse without some experience or some special training", and finally culminated in the founding of the Training School in October 1877.

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References

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