

# The Hidden Minds Project

Uncovering voices and information about Shenley Hospital



*Aerial view of the Shenley Hospital site*

Shenley Hospital (Shenley) was located near Radlett in Hertfordshire. It opened in 1934 and closed in 1998. Its catchment area spanned Harrow, Willesden, Wembley and Acton. In its heyday in 1957, it was home to over 2300 patients. Many of the patients had mental health problems but some were admitted because they had epilepsy or were unmarried and pregnant.

Shenley remains the most potent symbol of local mental health heritage for the Harrow community. Many former employees and patients are now older members of the community and the Hidden Minds project wanted to capture their memories, thoughts and experiences.

From October 2011 Mind in Harrow worked with 25 volunteers to research the history of Shenley, by looking at local and national archive material, interviewing former patients, staff and people who had a connection to Shenley. The volunteers wrote and produced each information panels and worked on the marketing material. The result is this exhibition, which aims to give an honest portrayal of what life was like at Shenley.

The exhibition can only represents a small proportion of Shenley's vast and interesting history. It is hoped that this glimpse will inspire people to understand its history and its significance in the context of Harrow's mental health heritage, as well as the wider developments in mental health treatment and policy.

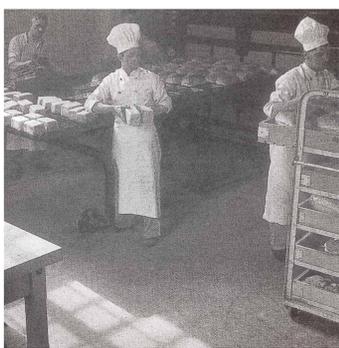
The project would not have been possible without the time and effort of all our volunteers, the people who were interviewed and support from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

We would also like to thank Shenley Park Trust, Bethlem Royal Hospital, Harrow Museum and Heritage Centre and U3A Harrow for their support and advice.

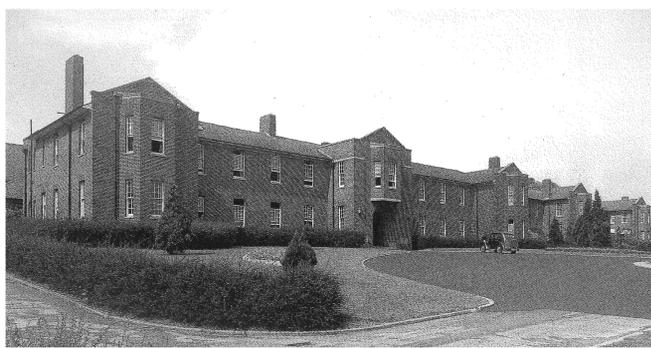
Mind in Harrow

# Recollections from Sister Shrimpton

*“If she dared to talk to a patient she was told she was wasting her time.”*



Staff baking bread



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Patients Dormitory

Below are extracts from a testimony given by Sister Shrimpton who worked with patients that were judged to have chronic schizophrenia. The report dates from 1960 but Sister Shrimpton is recollecting memories from before 1939. The report was used to train new nurses at Shenley from 1960 onwards in what was considered good and bad practice.

In the first few weeks of their service Nurses slept on the wards, being locked in at 10 pm. Hours were from 7 am to 8 pm on 6 consecutive days with two days off each week. There were no married staff. Anybody getting married left automatically.

If she dared to talk to a patient she was told she was wasting her time.

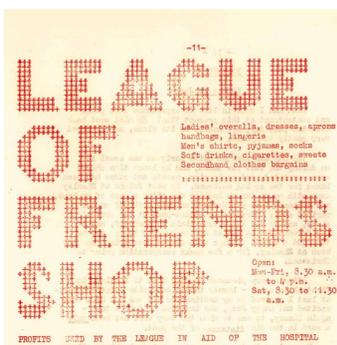
Domestic work rosters were hung up in the ward, indicating to every Nurse what kind of domestic work she was supposed to be doing for each half hour of her time on duty. Sister Shrimpton was detailed to the kitchen, where she spent her day cutting bread, scrubbing the floor and generally charring.

Patients in 3B were aired in A.3 airing court - this consisted of patients walking round in circles, which they were made to do by a Nurse, the other Nurses remained standing at a fixed point to prevent patients escaping. Patients were put to bed at 6 p.m., receiving cocoa, dry bread and cheese at 5.30 pm.

She said that she found them [patients] lying on the floor, wet and dirty, fighting in corners not knowing their own names and behaving like animals. She said that there were 20 cups on the ward, with the result that many patients drank out of jam jars and sop bowls. With the arrival of Dr Hurst patients were divided into groups and Nurses spent lengthy sessions teaching them how to strip and make beds. The most deteriorated patients were gradually got on to simple occupational tasks, such as using crayons, building words and making papier mache bowls.

# Shenley League of Friends

*“One shop sold general supplies including snacks, chocolates and cigarettes, the other sold second-hand clothing and linen.”*



*Page extract from the Shenley League of Friends magazine*



*Prize giving event possibly organised by the Shenley League of Friends*



*Fancy dress event possibly organised by the Shenley League of Friends*



*An outing for staff and patients organised by the Shenley League of Friends*

The Shenley League of Friends (the League) was set up in 1959 and was affiliated to the National Association of Leagues of Hospital Friends. The League was run by volunteers. They organised and managed activities to improve the lives of the patients and staff.

The League ran two independent shops on the Shenley site, which raised funds for the League's work and supplied useful items to staff and patients. One shop sold general supplies including snacks, chocolates and cigarettes; the other sold second-hand clothing and linen. A credit system enabled patients who could not leave their wards to purchase items from these shops.

The Patients Holiday Fund was funded by the League who used it to organise holidays and excursions to seaside resorts such as Margate and Weston Super Mare. By the 1980s the League had purchased and operated two minibuses which ran seven days a week, making it easier to take patients out for day excursions such as going to local towns, trips to the cinema and theatre. The minibuses also facilitated relatives and friends visiting patients at Shenley. The minibus service ran seven days a week.

Another of the League's main activities was to organise Easter and Christmas celebrations. They organised the annual Christmas party for staff and patients and a Christmas gift appeal. This encouraged the donation of gifts to Shenley, which would be given to patients who had no visiting relatives or friends. They also organised events at Shenley such as the Best Decorated Ward competition.

The League was instrumental in many other activities at Shenley. These included advocating for better facilities onsite, such as having a hair salon and sport facilities; purchasing physiotherapy equipment; garden furniture, equipment to support music therapy, as well as a training bursary scheme for staff.

As Shenley began to close down and patients were moved into the community, the League gave practical support to patients being transferred. They awarded each discharged patient with a leaving gift that included a towelling robe, two sets of nightwear, toiletries and a key fob.

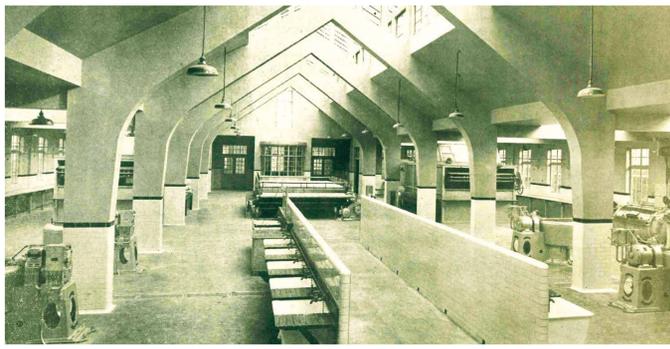
In 1996 Mrs Beryl MacKay, chairperson of the Shenley League of Friends, was awarded an MBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours for her services to the League, which spanned nearly 40 years. The League stopped functioning when Shenley closed in 1998.

# The Official Opening of Shenley Hospital

*“Hopes for the hospital ... were high”*



*King George V and Queen Mary at the Shenley Hospital opening ceremony*



*Laundry room*



*Water Tower*

King George V and Queen Mary officially opened Shenley Hospital (Shenley) on 31 May 1934, the largest mental health hospital in the UK.

A 40 minute royal visit was planned; the official opening would take 15 minutes in the recreation hall. The plan was negotiated between Shenley Hospital and the Lord Chamberlain, acting on behalf of the royals.

The Lord Chamberlain was precise in his instructions, for example:

- Orchids would be “acceptable” to Queen Mary
- The number of people to be presented to their Majesties was limited, no doubt to spare the royal handshake
- The women presented were to be listed with title and surname only, whereas men were listed with their titles, first names and surnames
- The dress code was to be morning dress - decorations could be worn but were “not to be encouraged”

Only four press photographers and four newsreel cameras were to be present at the ceremony. A request was sent to the Lord Chamberlain: would a few press photographers be allowed to accompany the royal party on their tour inside the buildings “at an appropriate distance”? The reply was a firm refusal, pointing out that the press should know by now not to pursue the matter.

The King’s speech given at the opening referred to the important medical advances of recent years, new methods of treatment and his hopes that local authority hospitals such as Shenley would reflect this. He made particular reference to the reception villa at Shenley, for the treatment of the early onset of mental illness.

The hospital organised a tour of inspection. Their Majesties met management and staff but not patients. However, patients were in residence at the time of the opening. By contrast in 1984, H.R.H. the Duchess of Gloucester met patients and staff at the hospital.

Hopes for the hospital as a beacon of good practice and cutting edge thinking on mental health care were high.

On the day itself, everything went as planned. Shortly after their Majesties had departed, tea was served in the marquee at 4.30p.m.

# Closure of Shenley Hospital

*“In the 1980s Shenley started transferring acute patients into Community Mental Health programmes”*



Church



Mansion



Pavillion

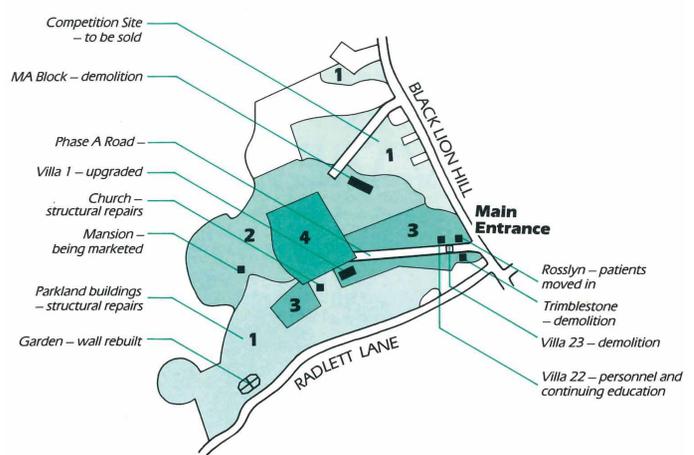
Shenley Hospital closed on 28th February 1998, having provided mental health care for North West London residents for 64 years. Since its opening in 1934, Shenley had been considered highly progressive; from the way the wards were designed in a “villa system” to the treatments it provided.

Patient numbers were at their highest in the early 1950s but started to decline after the new Mental Health Act in 1959. The aim of the Act was to provide care in the community, moving away from the long stay hospitals where care could be described as institutional.

The 1960s and 1970s were all about change at Shenley. There were new guidelines to follow from the Ministry of Health and new methods of treatment for mental illness – from new drugs such as Chlorpromazine, to talking therapies such as psychotherapy. Then came the introduction of psychiatric in-patient units at general hospitals. These units also offered day care; allowing patients to receive treatment and go home the same day. In 1988 Shenley opened such a unit at Central Middlesex Hospital.

In the 1980s Shenley started transferring acute (non-severe) patients into Community Mental Health (CMH) programmes and discharging the remaining patients into local community settings. This eventually led to the closure of Shenley in February 1998 and the site was sold to developers.

The former site of Shenley Hospital is now a mixture of luxury housing and a park, made as a gift to the people of the village of Shenley and its neighbouring parishes. The Shenley Park Trust is now the custodian of what remains of the site and the grounds are open to the public. The Trust also seeks to preserve the memory and history of Shenley Hospital.



The developers plans for the Shenley Hospital site

# Villa 21-An Experiment in Anti-Psychiatry

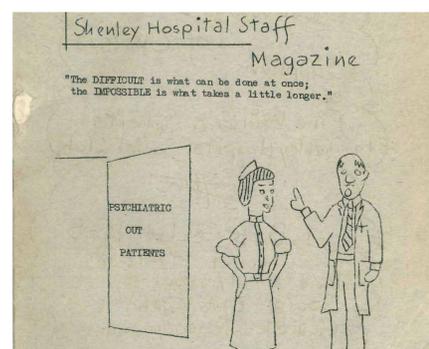
*“Villa 21 is often cited as a landmark in the move towards care in the community”*



Patients Villa



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Front cover of the Shenley Hospital staff magazine

Between 1962-1966, Dr. David Cooper ran Villa 21. Anti-psychiatry was the thinking behind Villa 21.

Anti-psychiatrists thought the practices in use at Shenley were replicating the hierarchies of power and the control mechanisms of society; they damaged rather than helped patients.

Villa 21 was to be a truly democratic community in which staff and patients were considered equals. Staff intervention and drug treatment were kept to a minimum. Symptoms of mental illness were to be seen as part of a self-healing process, which would be supported not suppressed.

There were 42 schizophrenic male patients aged 15-20. A typical day for a patient would be:

- Community meeting of all patients and staff
- Small group meetings of 5 – 7 patients with a psychiatrist
- 2 ½ hours of work e.g. interior decorating or toy making

Patients regulated their getting up times, ward cleanliness and personal hygiene. Ancillary staff were advised to leave any uncleared rubbish or dirty crockery. As a result visitors commented on the dirt and mess on the ward. However, staff and patient relations were good; physical restraint was seldom used and drugs were minimally prescribed. Shenley was one of the first hospitals to fight against the stigma of mental illness and Villa 21 was part of this.

Discharge and readmission rates compared well with other wards.

It was not easy working in Villa 21. Staff had been recruited for their openness to new ideas but they still had doubts and not all were comfortable with their roles. Other colleagues teased them.

At a staff meeting held in Dr. Cooper's absence matters came to a head when a member of the night staff complained about the ward to the nursing superintendent. They then decided on a more structured regime of staff intervention.

When Villa 21 was shut down, Dr. Cooper concluded that his approach would be more effective in small community-based units. Villa 21 is often cited as a landmark in the move towards care in the community.