From workhouse to hospital – Guildford's health service history uncovered

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Charlotteville Jubilee Trust will chart the history of the Guildford Union Workhouse Infirmary from its creation in 1834, through its stint as a First World War military hospital, to the creation of a new hospital on part of the site after the NHS was created in 1948.

Volunteer researchers will also contrast the type of diseases and rudimentary treatments found in the workhouse infirmary with the illnesses and development of care in the modern NHS.

Historic photographs, including those showing old workhouse buildings that were adapted to provide hospital accommodation, will be digitised. Local people including former patients and past hospital workers such as nurses, porters, ancillary staff and gardeners are being asked to share their stories, all of which will go to create a permanent exhibition to be displayed in the Spike Community and Heritage Centre that is housed in part of the former Union workhouse. An educational tour of the area will also be created.

Open for the past three years since its restoration was made possible by a £1.2million grant from HLF, the Spike Community and Heritage Centre has welcomed a number of visitors who worked on the site at the former St Luke's Hospital or were patients there. Many had expressed an interest in finding out more about the site's history and contributing to the story themselves.

Stuart McLeod, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund South East England, said: "The evolution of healthcare in Guildford from its rather primitive beginnings will fascinate many people and this project will create a permanent record with the help of those who were part of the process from the middle of the last century."

For Charlotteville Jubilee Trust Chairman John Redpath said: "The development of health care in the UK has its roots buried deep in the old workhouse infirmaries of the Poor Law era. This is a very exciting project that will involve a great deal of community involvement and, with the aid of the grant from HLF, we will now be able to tell the story of St Luke's Hospital, a story which is reflected up and down the country where hospitals developed on many of the 600 or so Union workhouse sites."

Further information

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