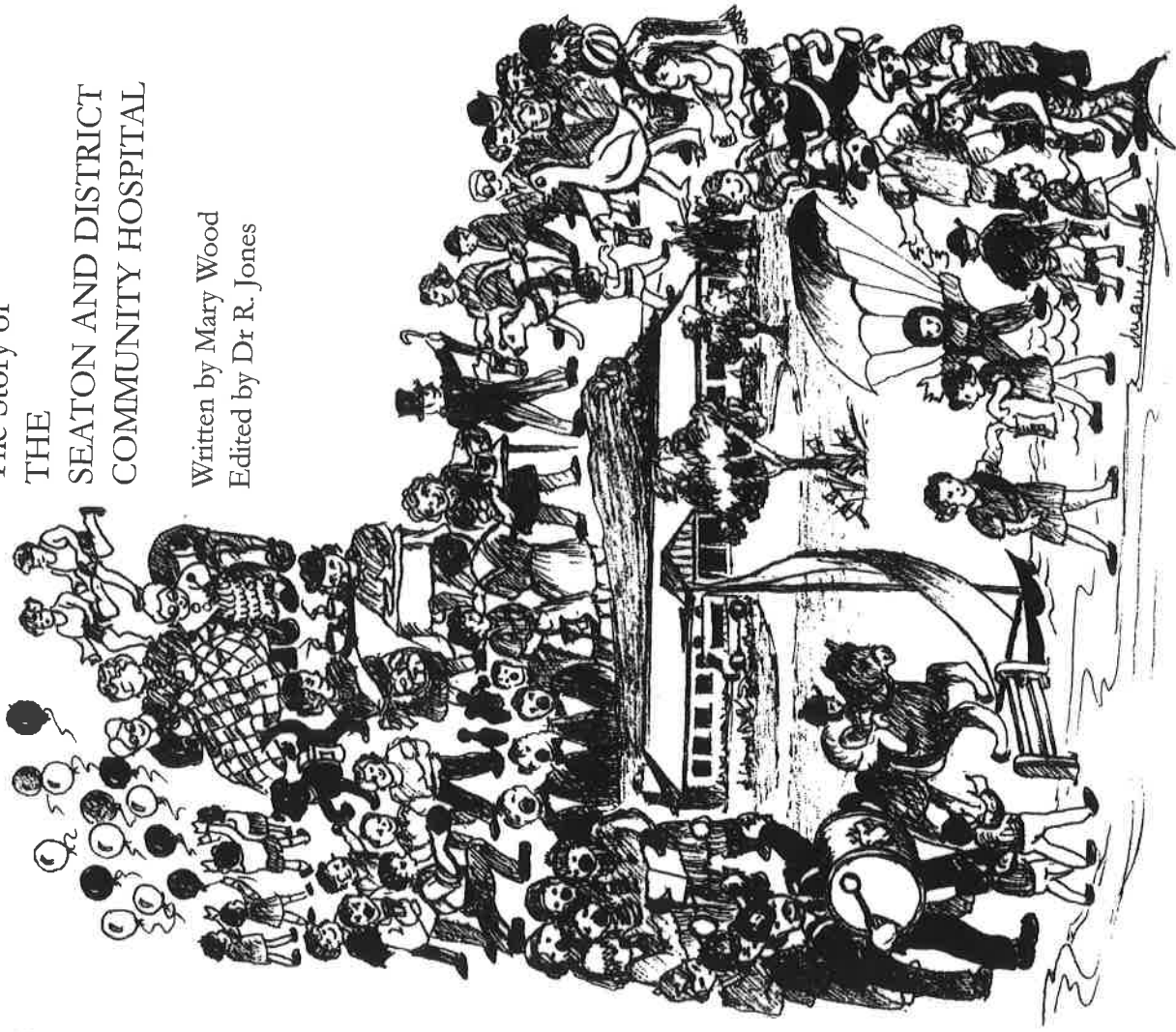


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# THAT'S WHAT FRIENDS ARE FOR

The Story of  
THE  
SEATON AND DISTRICT  
COMMUNITY HOSPITAL

Written by Mary Wood  
Edited by Dr R. Jones



Proceeds from the sale to be used for the Mary Wood Physio-Therapy Department, Seaton and District Community Hospital, Seaton, Devon.

Typeset, designed and printed by Steves Print & Design Ltd,  
26 Fore Street, Seaton, Devon EX12 2AD



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Twenty years ago, a great many people remembered the Hospital, through the League of Friends, in their Wills. As mentioned in this booklet, the first large legacy paid for the building of Heron Ward in 1988/1989. Results of such generosity, in the form of legacies and gifts, both large and small, meant that the League was able to pay some £750,000 for the building of the New Wing a few years later.

Over the years, improvements have been made and equipment provided through the League of Friends. Among these have been the automatic entrance doors; the exterior canopy; a conservatory leading from the Day Room and an extension to the Physiotherapy Unit and kitchen. Current expenditure provides for extension and improvement to the foyer, a new waiting room and new curtains throughout the hospital. The League has also paid for the redecoration of the ward areas.

Money is needed all the time, and costs keep rising. The population of Seaton and District has grown enormously during the past years and continues to increase. Who knows what the Hospital will need in the future?

Continuing support for the work of the League of Friends is vital, so that money will always be available to meet requirements.

Mary Wood

## THAT'S WHAT FRIENDS ARE FOR

### THE STORY OF THE SEATON AND DISTRICT COMMUNITY HOSPITAL

Written by Mary Wood  
Edited by Dr R. Jones

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## THAT'S WHAT FRIENDS ARE FOR

*Dedicated to the people of Seaton and District, who proved that it could be done.*

This is a true story, a story of faith. It is the story of the faith of a whole community in the belief that a dream can come true, and of the close drawing together of a quite small rural community in the work necessary to the realisation of its dream. It is the story of the birth of Seaton and District Community Hospital.

It all started so quietly, one evening in the late Summer of 1984. At a Public Meeting in Seaton Town Hall, Dr. R. V.H. Jones, senior GP, announced that the Exeter Health Authority had agreed that a hospital unit should be built in Seaton. The Unit would care for 15 physically infirm elderly patients, and 9 psycho-geriatric patients.

The plight of these last-named patients in this district had always been particularly sad. Accommodated in hospitals in Honiton and Exeter, these elderly and distressed people were far away from their familiar surroundings, and among strangers. Their relatives and friends, often themselves elderly, found visiting difficult owing to the lack of public transport and the distances involved. It was wonderful to know that the unhappy situation had been recognised by the Exeter Health Authority and that distress was to be alleviated.

The news, therefore, was received with pleasure and gratitude, but, however much needed, especially in this retirement area, the provision of a Geriatric Unit did not fulfil the desperate requirements in the health care of the district. Alone among the small towns of East Devon, Seaton had no hospital. Sidmouth, Axminster, Honiton, Ottery St. Mary, Budleigh Salterton, all have their little hospitals. Seaton, Colyton, and their widely-scattered neighbouring villages were dependent upon the facilities of Axminster and the large hospitals at Exeter. To make things even more difficult until recent years Seaton did not have its own ambulance station, and the public transport to Exeter is rudimentary.

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November, 1988

First £100,000 raised by the League of Friends.

May 10<sup>th</sup>, 1989

Hospital's First Birthday. Offer made by the League of Friends to the Exeter Health Authority to pay the full cost of the building and equipping the new Acute Ward.

June, 1989

First £250,000 raised by the League of Friends.

August 1<sup>st</sup>, 1989

Ceremonial 'turf-cutting' of site of new Ward by Mr. Murray French, Chairman of the Exeter Health Authority.

January 17<sup>th</sup>, 1990

New Ward opened by Dr. J. V.H. Jones.

3. Important dates in the history of the League, 1984 – 1989
- October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1984      Formation of the Seaton and District Hospital League of Friends.
- February, 1985      League attains Charity Status
- October, 1985      Hospital plans altered at request of the League to include a Physio-Therapy Department.
- November 5<sup>th</sup>, 1986      Official 'turf-cutting' ceremony by Dr. R.V.H. Jones, as start to building the hospital. The Exeter Health Authority changed status of hospital to that of Community Hospital.
- December, 1986      First Hospital Day.
- February, 1987      BUILDING BEGAN
- February, 1987      Agreement by the Exeter Health Authority for the Addition of a four-bed Acute Ward, on a 50/50 cost-sharing basis with the League of Friends.
- March 25<sup>th</sup>, 1987      Dr. R. Jones becomes the first Hon. Life President of the League of Friends.
- June, 1987      First £50,000 raised by the League.
- April, 1988      Tour of Seaton & District Community Hospital by the public at the invitation of the Exeter Health Authority.
- April, 1988      ADMISSION OF THE FIRST PATIENTS.
- May 10<sup>th</sup>, 1988      Opening of the Hospital by H.R.H. the Duchess of Gloucester.

Much work had been done in the 1930's by Seaton people. Determined to build a hospital for themselves they had made great efforts, raising considerable funds. After the introduction of the National Health Service in 1948, the Health Authority refused to countenance the idea of supporting a *new* hospital. In Seaton, after the many years of work, efforts were made to persuade the Authority to a change of mind, but by 1961 it became clear that no progress was being made. The Charity accepted what it saw as inevitable and applied to the Charity Commissioners for permission to disperse its accumulated funds in other ways. After as many original donors as possible had been reimbursed the remainder of the fund was used to supply a new day room at Axminster hospital.

No wonder, then, that Dr. Jones's news was received with great interest. At the end of his talk he suggested that a League of Friends might be formed to support the future hospital and, later, asked me to stand for election as Secretary to such a League. A further Public Meeting was called, and it was at that Meeting that my appointment was made. Volunteers for service on a Steering Committee were called for. Thirteen people, all members of local Parish Councils or of interested organisations, later met. The Steering Committee was formed and Mr. Leslie Mansfield, of Colyton, elected as its Chairman. This Committee took the name 'Seaton and District Hospital League of Friends'. This new League had no hospital to support. Indeed, at that time, the purchase of the land upon which the hospital was to be built had not been completed. This is believed to be the first recorded instance of a formation of a League of Friends of a hospital which did not exist. I told you that this is a story of faith.

You will have noticed that the word 'hospital' was used right from the very beginning. The promised provision of a Geriatric Unit was regarded by the new League of Friends as the thin end of a wedge. The League was determined to grasp this change to bring a hospital to Seaton, whatever difficulties might lie in its way.

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The local Press was, from the start, supremely supportive. The success of the establishment and growth of the League could not have been achieved without this help. Every item of League news was, and still is, given prominence. Willing Press support is the life-blood of any charity. I certainly cannot express sufficiently my gratitude to all of the local pressmen, together with the local radio stations, with whom I have worked so happily during the past five years.

As a result of this help our aims became known. Money began to trickle into the young League's bank account. Mr. Des Garrett and his friends were the first to begin work. The proceeds of their Mammoth Jumble Sale formed the foundation of League funds. A large private donation was added almost at the same time. The ladies of Colyford were there at the start too, going around the village carol-singing. I remember that, having no League collecting tins to give to them, I made some out of large aspiring containers given to me by Mr. Colin Budden, the chemist in Seaton. Home-made they may have been, but surely more apt to the spirit of the baby League of Friends than spanking-new commercially-made tins.

It was then, with much relief to us all, that the League attained Charity Status in February 1985 in the name of 'Seaton and District Hospital League of Friends'. As a Registered Charity, the League could now accept money in safety. All funds are safeguarded in that they can only be used as set out in the League Constitution, 'to support the Seaton and District Hospital and other invalids in the community'. The Constitution is a legal document, and must be obeyed in all its clauses.

Some people question the need for charity support of a hospital. 'They' should supply everything is still said to me by some. But stop and consider. No two hospitals are alike. Each has its own particular needs according to its work. To satisfy all of these would imposed an enormous burden of taxation. Of course the State supplies every basic need, and extras are provided when possible and when funds

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The Executive Committee were:  
All the doctors of the area (ex-officio)  
All Church Ministers

There are a number of Committee Members who served over the years since the end of the War and took a keen interest in the fund, but are now deceased:

Mr. A. Burges, Dr. A. Coburn, Mr. G.S. Clare, Mr. L.J. Lorton, Mr. H.K. Norcombe, Dr. and Mrs. A.H. Smart, Mrs. M.F. Holmes, Miss G. Pelly, Mr. H. Clapp, Miss Sudlow.

At the final Meeting in 1985, the following were present:

Mr. C.F. Newberry (Trustee) Mr. J. Bennett (Secretary) Dr. C. Bastin, Mr. R.F. Chapple, Mr. H.F. Norcombe, Mr. K. Trendchard. Apologies from: Mr. J. Lorton, Rev. S. Croft.

1. First Committee of the Seaton and District Hospital League of Friends, elected on October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1984.

Chairman: Mr. L. Mansfield (Colyton)

Treasurer: Mr. D. Hawkins (Seaton)

Secretary: Mrs. M.D. Wood (Seaton)

*Committee members*

Mr. T. Ashby (Beer)

Mrs. M. MacLean (Colyford)

Mrs. E. Trevett (Seaton)

Mrs. D. Rogers (Seaton)

Dr. P. Hatfield (Branscombe)

Mrs. N. Ellis (Axmouth)

Mr. J. White (Seaton)

Mrs. R. Willets (Seaton)

Mrs. K. Coles (Seaton)

Dr. J. Coop (Seaton)

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## APPENDICES

1. With acknowledgement to Mr. K.J. Trenchard: 'The first Public Meeting to consider the proposals for a local hospital was in March, 1934. During the period up to the beginning of the War, money was raised by gifts, donations, subscriptions and fund-raising events.

After the War had ended, the National Health Service had come into being, the Committee negotiated with the Health Authorities for a hospital in Seaton, but this was turned down at the time on the grounds that there were insufficient funds available at that time, and that the funds should be handed over to the Regional Hospital Board. The Committee refused to hand over the funds, and it was agreed to invest the moneys for the time being. This was in August 1953.

In February, 1961, the Charity Commissioners wrote to the Trustees regarding the funds held, and pointed out that, in the circumstances, the funds would have to be dealt with under the Charities Act of 1960. So began the long High Court action for the disposal of the funds. Some subscribers to the fund had their money returned, and the remainder was passed to Axminster Hospital. The Final Meeting of the original Seaton Hospital Fund was in June 1985.

The original Trustees of the Fund were:

Dr. D. McKayOhm (Chairman), onetime Headmaster of Colyton Grammar School

Mr. C.I. Lentell F.C.A. (Treasurer)

Dr. A.A. MacLean

Mr. P.G. Westlake

All the Trustees had died at the time of the dissolution, but credit must be given to them all. All but Mr. Westlake were at the Original Meeting, and Mr. Westlake joined the Committee within a few months.

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allow. A League of Friends can supply at once. Some items requested from a League of Friends may appear to be luxuries. But have any of us moved into a new home to find sufficient shelving and cupboards? How many of us have replaced something so basic as a sink or a wash-basin with something more suitable to our needs?

An example of this is shown in two of Seaton Hospital's bathrooms. A bath is just a bath to us when we are healthy and active. When ill, injured or infirm, taking a bath is a totally different matter. The process is undignified, difficult and often painful. Hard work is involved for the attendant nurse who must bend, lift, support and stretch. At Seaton, two baths have been installed which help both patient and nurse. One was given by the village of Beer, through the Baroness Rolle Welfare Trust, the other by a local lady. Have you ever seen a bath which goes up and down at the touch of a button? The nurse can place her patient into the water, using one of the bath-hoists donated through the League of Friends, with the bath at the lowest level. A touch, and the bath, with water and patient, gently rises to a height to suit the nurse. She can then assist her patient without bending or stretching. Both baths have adjustable 'jacuzzi' jets, varying direction and pressure, either swirling the water around in a soothing massage, or directed as a stronger massage on painful spots. I hear that an aching back derives much happy relief from this.

In so many similarly thoughtful ways the people of the entire district have provided the best of facilities and equipment for the use of both patients and medical staff. The League of Friends prides itself that no request has ever been refused or delayed. It has always been obvious that everybody decided that, if we were going to have the long-dreamed of hospital, then nothing but the best was good enough for its use.

The League itself did not stand still, waiting for and receiving gifts. It might have been our aim to turn the coming Geriatric Unit into a hospital, but the idea had to be passed to, and accepted by, the South-West Regional Health Authority and the Exeter Health Authority.

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This, in so few words, seems to be simple. Remember, however, that neither Authority knew us. Much care and discussion had to be taken to achieve the present happy co-operation between us. Above all, first and foremost, the people of the area must give proof, by their communal interest and work in support of the League, that the urgent need for a hospital was recognised by all, and that everyone was willing to work together to achieve that goal.

A very pleasant step was taken as soon as the League attained Charity Status. The Registered Charity number must be printed on the League's writing paper. A member of the Committee suggested that a 'logo' might be designed to accompany this. The Headmaster of Seaton Primary School was approached, and he kindly agreed to let the children work out an appropriate design. The results astonished us. The thought and understanding shown by these young children in their drawings – although I remember one beautiful drawing of a purple aeroplane – was quite remarkable. We finally chose the design by a ten-year-old girl, Lotte Strawbridge. Her interpretation of the spirit of a League of Friends, the caring hands supporting a bed, is now used on all of our League's writing paper and poster.

Everybody was working now. Seaton Scouts and Guides gave the proceeds of their 1985 pantomime to the League, and then, on Palm Sunday, the first big event organised to help the League drew crowds to Seaton's sea-front. The Round Table held a fun-run donating the entire proceeds, £2,500, to the League. The enthusiasm of this event, and the publicity, acted as a spur to every other organisation in the district. Mooney began to flow in as interest in the work of the League quickened.

To fulfil the health needs of the community, as was our intent, and to become worthy of the name 'hospital', facilities of the proposed building must expand. At the request of our doctors, exploration was made, together with the South-West Regional Health Authority, into the possibility of the provision of a Hydro-Therapy pool, for the treatment

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land bring responsibilities and careful future planning. Need has been expressed for accommodation for the ambulance-men at the hospital, and for improved staff accommodation. Should the League be asked for co-operation and help in the provision of this, it is our duty to be ready to give assistance. The League is pledged to this support.

'Sitting back' and admiring the hospital, and self-congratulation on achievement is not the policy of a League of Friends. The League must be strong, alert, and in continual work and readiness to support its hospital. Awareness of possible changes in the N.H.S. is essential. The help and continual support of the public in the work of the League is vital. Seaton has a Community Hospital, and has worked long and hard to achieve it. We must all be aware of the future, and continue our work.

May I end on a personal note? I have, so often, been asked what occasion during the past remarkable five years is the one which is most important to me. Was it the news of Community status, or the ceremonial 'dig', the arrival of the first load of bricks, or the Royal Opening? Was it the giving of my name to the Physio-Therapy Department, the day that I received the award from the South-West Regional Health Authority, or the afternoon that I walked on the lawns of Buckingham Palace?

Those of you who know me also know my answer. The greatest moment for me was that morning in April, 1988, when the first patients came home to the Seaton and District Community Hospital. The day that the hospital became alive and everybody's dream came true.



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delighted that Dr. Jones consented to the use of his name for this wing, and it is as first part of this that the new ward will be opened, by Dr. Jones, on January 17<sup>th</sup>, 1990. The rest of the 'Dr. Bob Jones Wing' will be built at a future date, as need of further facilities becomes apparent.

Plans for making the Eastern Garden, outside Kingfisher Ward, are afoot. Mrs. Monica Read and her 'Friendly Gardeners' will be involved in this, and plants and shrubs given through the League.

I have, until now, left the mention of the League volunteer workers within the hospital, who have carried out their duties as Flower Ladies, Friendly Gardeners, Shop Ladies, Ironers, together with acting as helping hands in Kingfisher Ward ever since the hospital was opened. Nobody but the staff knows that they are there, but all can see the result of their selfless work. There are twenty-eight of these ladies and gentlemen. They carry out the spirit of service of a League of Friends.

The League suffered a heavy loss when one of these, Vi Richardson, the 'Hospital Flower Lady', died suddenly in September 1989. She was one of the quiet, stalwart fund-raisers of the League, working from the first moment of the League's formation in 1984. She formed a group of friends into the Hospital Flower Ladies, who go in each day to clean and refill all the flower vases in the hospital. At the request of her husband, Bill, money given in her memory has been used to purchase a Wishing Well, which stands by the hospital entrance, so that Vi's tireless work of fund-raising will continue. This Well, surrounded by flowers planted and tended by the 'Friendly Gardeners' is a beautiful reminder of the work of a true Friend.

League of Friends affairs have reached a stage when Company Status is being arranged. The first quarter of a million pounds has been raised, though mostly spent as it was given, and property has been left and given to the League. The legacy of a house, and the gift of a piece of

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of stroke, arthritic and post-operative patients. However, after much careful exploration of usage and costs, it was found to be too expensive for the Exeter Health Authority to staff, operate and maintain such a pool, even with financial help from the League. The idea had to be dropped, and a change of direction made. This was only sideways, now towards the possible addition of a Physio-Therapy Department to the promised building. This time exploration into usage and expense brought full understanding of Seaton's needs, and agreement was given by the Exeter Health Authority that such a department would be added, with financial assistance accepted from the League of Friends.

Our Hospital was taking shape. Original draft plans were scrapped, and new ones drawn to include a Physio-Therapy and an Occupational Therapy department. Now, although not even begun, the hospital had four departments, the Geriatric, the Psycho-Geriatric, the Physio-Therapy and the Occupational Therapy. The League of Friends asked that, because of this the name 'Seaton Geriatric Unit' be dropped and the name 'Seaton and District Hospital' be formally adopted instead. To the pride and delight of everyone this request was granted by the Exeter Health Authority. We had aimed for the stars and they were now within our reach. Efforts were doubled as fund-raising for the League's contribution to the cost of the Physio-Therapy Department began.

All was not plain sailing, however. There were difficulties to be overcome at home. Memories of the work and effort so freely given to the raising of money before the War, and the disappointment when high hopes had been dashed, gave a quite hard core of resistance to renewed fund-raising. This was perfectly understandable, but proved to be a major problem. It was overcome in the only possible way, by the continual unswerving and positive example of the League, and their refusal to recognise any hindrance to the determination to bring the long-awaited hospital to Seaton, and that in the shortest possible time. Hesitation in the forwarding of this plan could easily have proved fatal. Perseverance won through, and this purposeful attitude of the League began to fire trust and enthusiasm.

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A spectacular League event, the first of the planned summer efforts, brought enormous support and enthusiasm from everybody. This was the ambitious 'Age of Elegance', which was held on Seaton's sea-front. This combined stalls, a parade of horse-drawn carriages, this organised by Mr. Nick Larcombe, and an exhibition of vintage and veteran cars arranged by Mr. Brian Norcombe. With fancy dress worn by everybody, this was a spectacular afternoon, and served to put the League firmly 'on the map'.

October, 1985, just one year after the League's inception, saw the first tangible evidence of the League's work and purpose. A quantity of medical equipment for the use of the community nurses and the Hospital at Home was presented to Mr. Robert Mounce, the Senior Nurse. The League was getting into its stride.

To combat the ever-existing rumours of delays in, and even cancellation of, building the hospital, the League asked for help from the Exeter Health Authority. An Extraordinary Meeting was the result of this, with invited guests from all the local Parish Councils. The Community Unit Administrator of the Exeter Health Authority brought with him the Senior Physio-Therapist. They brought plans of the hospital and of the Physio-Therapy Department. The progress of the project was explained, and the great local need that would be satisfied by the provision of the Physio-Therapy Department. This meeting served its purpose. The belief that Seaton and District was, in truth, to have its hospital was strengthened. Renewed interest and effort, now spreading throughout the area, showed this. People could see that the League was in earnest in its intent, and that this was recognised by the Exeter Health Authority.

A pattern of money being given to the League instead of buying flowers for funerals began to form. This money is very special to the League, and now forms a significant source of income. Many relatives asked that money might be earmarked for use in the purchase of specific gifts. A list of these requests was kept, and later, medical equipment,

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Mr. Court and our own Chairman, spoke of the future and answered questions about the hospital and its work. Birthday gifts, given to the hospital through the League, amounted to some £1,000.

The long, hot summer of 1989 baked the ground hard, and when Mr. Murray French tried to cut the first turf in preparation for the building of the new Acute Ward, he had great difficulty in getting a spade into the earth. There was no turf to lift. It had all been burned away by the sun. However, the occasion, my last appearance as League Secretary, was an important landmark in the progress of the hospital and a very happy one. Next day the bulldozer moved in, and building began. I had hoped to be able to see it completed before ending my service to the League, but was quite content that work was in progress.

Earlier, it was mentioned that the League had a £1 for £1 arrangement with the Exeter health Authority for any future development of the hospital. However, for the new ward, the overwhelming support of the League by the entire district meant that the League's Building Fund reached far beyond its target, and the whole cost of this building could be met by the League. This is estimated at some £80,000 - £90,000, which includes equipping the ward. Seaton Lions have promised the cost of the furniture. Revenue costs are the responsibility of the Exeter Health Authority. It is so easy to write that sentence, but it is not a simple subject. The Exeter Health Authority, as all Health Authorities, works within a very tight budget. Any extra or unexpected expense from one hospital affects this budget, and other services could suffer. The League of Friends is enormously grateful to the E.H.A. for fitting the wishes of the people of Seaton and District into its financial plans. Over the past five years the Authority has backed us in the realisation of our dream. This must never be forgotten.

The new ward, to be called 'Heron Ward' in continuation of Mrs. Webb's plan of using the names of sea and estuary birds for the hospital wards (the first wards being Kingfisher and Cormorant) is the first part of a new wing. The Exeter Health Authority and the League are

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great surprise and honour for me, when I was told that the Physio-Therapy Department was to bear my name. For the first time in my life no words came. But what words can express feelings at such a time?

Because the Opening had, of course, been held during the afternoon, many people had not been able to come along, nor had been able to leave their work to see the Duchess as she drove through Seaton on her way to Marshlands. Many of the shops had taken much care in decorating their windows to welcome her. The same people had been unable to watch the 'dig' celebrations in 1986, so we tried to make some amends. Next morning we took the remains of the cake, cut into morsels, around to the surgeries, banks, shops and offices, trying to distribute them as far as possible so that all who had worked so hard could have some tiny remembrance.

A change in League leadership was on the way. Our Chairman, Geoff Ellerton, had made plans to live abroad and gave warning that a new Chairman would soon be needed. We knew of a young businessman in the town and approached him. He worked as co-Chairman with Geoff until March, 1989, when he took over the League Chair. Marc Kastner is the youngest League Chairman in the country, and our League is extremely fortunate to have his enthusiastic leadership.

I, too, knew that my term of office must soon end. Even with the secretarial assistance of, firstly Mrs. Maude, then followed by Mrs. Pearman, I was finding my work very heavy.

The hospital's first birthday came round, surprisingly quickly. The hospital was full, the Physio-therapy Department busy. Trees, plants, bulbs and shrubs, given by local people, were flourishing in the grounds. All birthdays must be celebrated with a party, so the League held a birthday party in Seaton Town Hall. Mrs. Mary Webb cut the birthday cake. The Town Hall was crowded. Dr. Jones, Mr. French,

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special mattresses, garden seats and planters, etc. were purchased with the agreement of the donors. This practice continues.

By now, so much was being done by organisations, private individuals, pubs, clubs, and other groups, that the League Committee determined a permanent plan for League fund-raising. A League tradition of service must be established. Example must be shown. The ruling of the Constitution in the expected work among the public must be obeyed. A policy was adopted that has now become familiar, the annual Coffee Mornings in each town or village, a large Summer Fete in Seaton, and Hospital Day, this to be the main League event, on the Saturday before each Christmas.

The Summer Fete proved to be too large an undertaking to be organised by only one organisation, and very happy partnerships have been made with the R.N.L.I. and the Rotary Club of Seaton. This Fete has become the main attraction of the Summer and has developed into a two or three day event, with a 'pageant' visiting local shops, pubs, and clubs, and not only in Seaton, by invitation.

Throughout all this time conversations had been taking place about the planned date of commencement of building the hospital and the ever-present hindrance to League work form the 'doom and gloom' rumours that all would, once again come to nothing. To demonstrate, in no uncertain way, that building was imminent, that it was to be on the chosen site, and that there was no intention to alter these plans it was decided that an inaugural celebration would take place on the site.

In recognition of his unflinching efforts, over many years, to bring hospital care to Seaton, Dr. Jones was asked to officiate. He happily accepted the invitation.

The idea fired enthusiastic participation. A mechanical 'digger' was loaned for Dr. Jones's use. The Methodist Hall was loaned for the tea-party. The Fire Station was loaned! The League of Friends invited

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the children of Seaton Primary School to watch the turf-breaking ceremony and planned to give each child a gas-filled balloon so that, the moment that the turf was broken, a cloud of balloons would be loosed. But the filling of the balloons and the storage of them, was a problem. The Chief Fire Officer agreed, at once, to my hesitant request to borrow his Fire Station for the purpose. The Fire Engine was parked outside for the morning so that Mark Fox and his helpers could work inside. Without this wonderful gesture the children would have had no balloons.

Colyton Carnival Committee lent their bunting to decorate the perimeter fence of the building site. A loan of a complete set of Admiralty flags by a local yacht owner meant that we could also adorn the fence of the Methodist Church, next door, to welcome our guests at tea-time, although goodness knows what signals we were flying. A large crowd gathered, including a bus, loaned by the Axe Valley Mini Bus Company, full of elderly people who could not otherwise have been able to come along. The children came from the school, balloons bobbing above their heads. Representatives from the Exeter Health Authority, the South-West Regional Health Authority, local clergy, nurses, Councillors, doctors, all watched as Dr. Jones drove the 'digger' triumphantly round the field, then lowered the shovel to break the turf. Just to be sure, he did this a second time. The children cheered and released their balloons. The building of the hospital had begun and everybody had witnessed the start.

I have a match-box full of the soil dug up on that occasion, collected for me as soon as the turf had been broken. It is a cherished little box, full of Seaton's dreams.

A very happy tea-party followed. Such had been the wishes of everyone to make the occasion a success that donations towards the already minimal costs exceeded expenses. Thanks to this generosity the League found that a credit of over £4 remained at the end of the memorable day.

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lamp standards. Nothing was overlooked. At the same time, the League was busy working with the R.N.L.I. and the Rotarians in the organisation of the Armada Fair. Looking back, I can remember the lists, memoranda, letters – for routine League work must continue – that governed every moment of my time. The League was at full stretch, but it was the happiest time of its young life.

May 10<sup>th</sup> 1988, Opening Day, came at last. It was a clear, warm, bright day, full of sunshine, a real Devon welcome to our Royal visitor. Vi and Olive had placed fresh flowers throughout the hospital. Courtyard troughs and urns, given by local people, were full of flowering plants. The lawns, newly laid by the Exeter Health Authority, were smooth and green. The crowds began to gather. And the children came from school, bright in their scarlet and grey, flags in the hands, excited and happily ready to cheer as soon as the Royal car came into sight. We were all in our allotted places. Suddenly the cheers of the children signalled the arrival of the shining black cars, one of them flying the Royal pennant. All the little flags were waved, the children kept on cheering as the Duchess, dressed in blue, stepped from her car. Presentations were made, Stacey made her curtsy. Her Royal Highness toured the hospital, meeting staff and patients, and one or two of the stalwart workers of the League, who had knitted, sold, collected, throughout the past five years. The Chairman of the Exeter Health Authority asked her to unveil the brass plaque commemorating her visit. Again, the children waved and cheered. Then her Royal Highness made a gesture which will always be remembered. She walked across the car-park towards the children. Instead of passing the bus, full of elderly people, she climbed aboard to speak to them all. Their happiness was overflowing.

All too soon, the visit was over, and we waved our goodbyes as Her Royal Highness left the hospital to visit the Marshlands Day Centre. The crowds went home, so did the children, still waving their flags. We went into the Methodist Hall, to greet our guests and to give them tea. A cake was cut by Mrs. Webb, speeches were made. Then, a

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For some time, quiet work had been going on in preparation for such a splendid occasion. Close co-operation between the Lord Lieutenant's Office, the Exeter Health Authority and the League was needed, so that no detail could be overlooked. Everything must be perfect for Her Royal Highness.

One of the tasks, a most delightful one, allotted to the League was the choosing of a small girl of 5 or 6 years to present flowers to her Royal Highness. Every little girl in the district had the same right to selection, and the only fair way to choose was by ballot. All the local schools gladly co-operated, each holding its own ballot, the chosen names being sent to the League. These names were again dropped into a hat, and the League Chairman picked out the winner. Little Stacey Westlake of Beer was the lucky child and her parents gave delighted permission for her to take part in the ceremony.

It was only a fortnight before the Royal Opening that the patients waiting in Honiton came home. Vi Richardson and Olive Hopkins, both staunch League members, spent the morning placing flowers by each bed, in the day-rooms and in the hospital foyer. I went in too. A change had occurred. This was no longer a beautiful building. It had become warm and alive with a sense of purpose and quiet professional activity. It brought home to me the reality of the achievement that had been attained.

Final details of the Opening were being made. Mrs. Searle, of Southleigh, once more lent her largest bus so that some elderly people might be brought to see Her Royal Highness. In answer to our request to the Police that this might be parked close to the hospital a wonderful offer was made that the bus might be parked right on the hospital car-park. As Seaton primary School stands next door to the hospital, we could not leave the children to peer over the fence. Again came willing permission for the children to line the hospital driveway.

The League bought flags, so that each child might wave a welcome to the Royal visitor. The hospital itself must be decorated. The League Chairman, with his helpers, tied bunting round the eaves and to the

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A feature of the tea-party was the cutting of a ceremonial cake by Mr. Murray French, the Chairman of the Exeter Health Authority. Made and decorated, as a gift, by Bridget and Valerie Halford of the Devon Fayre Bakery, this large and beautiful cake had been proudly displayed in the Bakery's shop window. It was removed, ready to take to the Methodist Hall next morning, on the evening of November 4<sup>th</sup>. On the morning of November 5<sup>th</sup>, the date of the ceremonial 'dig', an explosion in the ovens of the bakery blew out the shop-window, together with all the bread and cakes on display, but the lovely Hospital Cake was mercifully saved.

The tea-party brought the most wonderful and completely unexpected surprise. After Mr. French had cut the cake, he announced that the Exeter Health Authority had been watching the activities of the Seaton and District Hospital League of Friends and taking note of the enormous and sustained effort of the whole district in its support. Because of this, the Authority had altered the status of the Seaton Hospital. It had been raised to the status of Community Hospital, and would be known as the Seaton and District Community Hospital.

At last, after the years of disappointment, and then renewed effort against all difficulties, Seaton and District had the hospital of its dreams. Nothing would stop League work now. We had aimed for the stars and, after only two years of work, had them firmly in our hands. The future was ours, an enormous responsibility.

As a Community Hospital, responsibility for development rests equally between a Health Authority, the doctors and nursing staff, and the community as represented by the League of Friends of the Hospital. Local support is of supreme importance. Seaton and District people had proved that they were worthy of the trust which had now been placed upon them. Taking up this great responsibility the League of Friends must be strong and steadfast, always aware of the importance of its work.

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At the 1986 Annual General meeting of the League, a week or so later, the League Chairman, Mr. Leslie Mansfield, resigned. He had guided the young League through the difficulties which beset its early days. Mr. Geoff Ellerton, a local businessman, who had been working with Mr. Mansfield for the past months, took his place.

During the planning of the 'dig' the League and the Exeter Health Authority had become better acquainted. A result of this amicable relationship was an offer to the League Committee of a £1 for £1 agreement of the cost of the next, or any future development, at the hospital. This offer was accepted by the League Committee. At the same time, the League's contribution to the cost of the Physio-Therapy department was decided as £10,000.

While arrangements were being made for the celebratory 'dig' the first Hospital Day was being organised. A full day of events was planned. Street collections were to be held in Beer, Colyton and Seaton, with Committee members, local doctors and the nurses out with collecting tins. I was asked why on earth the League had chosen a late December day for a Street Collection instead of a warm summer day when the town and villages were full of summer visitors. The answer is simple. The hospital 'belongs' to the local people, not to our summer holiday-makers.

On that first Hospital Day, we held no Coffee Morning in Seaton Town Hall. This has since been added with great success. We went straight from our collecting tins to a Punch and Judy show in the Town Hall. Dr. John Coop came as Father Christmas, a task that he has undertaken each year. The children came, laughed, clapped, sang, then went home with balloons and presents. The 'Evening with Friends' party held in the evening, something new to the town, causing heads to be shaken at our temerity, was not just a success, it was a WOW. Dr. M. Askew recited his 'Sam and the Christmas Pudding', Dr. Jones sang in the choir, Nurse Jill Bibby recited. The Locality Planning Manager of the Exeter Health Authority brought a Scottish friend to

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Legacies, too, began to come to the League. This is a wonderful way to help, for it ensures the future income so important to the League of Friends of a Community hospital.

Even local dogs have helped. Tim, a guide dog, has held his own stall at Coffee Mornings with his master, Mr. Dennis Parsons. Miss Gill Smart's dog has carried collecting tins.

At last, the date was fixed for the admittance of the first patients. This, a new hospital, was brought into operation in gradual stages. The first to come were local people, waiting in hospital in Honiton. Now they could come home, to their own area, and to their own doctors.

Then, a remarkable and wonderful gesture was made by the Exeter Health Authority. The hospital, now carpeted, furnished, ready for use, was 'lent' to the League for two hours of one afternoon, so that everyone who had worked so hard could come along and see the results of their efforts. League members and Committee members volunteered to act as stewards to guide people round the building. The day came, a beautiful Spring day. At lunch-time all work in and around the hospital stopped. Then the people came. We had expected quite a few, but, when the time came for the doors to be opened, a queue stretched from the doorway, across the car-park, up the drive and past the school as far as the Health Centre. If only the Chairman of the Exeter Health Authority could have been with us on that afternoon, to see the joy and pride, and gratitude – for two hours the people came, looked and admired.

A few weeks previously, the League and the Exeter Health Authority had been able to announce, with great pride, that Her Royal Highness the Duchess of Gloucester had graciously accepted the League's invitation to open the new hospital. She was to be Seaton's first Royal visitor, giving Royal recognition of all the hard work done to bring a hospital to Seaton.

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Devon. Miss Bentham's poem won her a wonderful prize of a collection of Dartington glass, together with a V.I.P. tour of the factory at Torrington. She generously gave the whole prize to the League, to benefit the new hospital. She suggested that I should go to collect the prize in her place. To my great disappointment, I was unable to go. Mrs. Webb went instead. When the Dartington glass people realised who she was, and that the glass was to be used to raise funds for her hospital, they generously added another £80 to the £200 already given by the Milk Marketing Board. Mrs. Webb chose all the glass, and was invited to 'blow' a glass of her own. She did two, so that she could give one to me. This is another of my treasures. We used the collection of beautiful glass as the 'Heirloom Raffle', so popular, and bringing in a magnificent £1,300.

So many other friends, I remember each one. The Carnival Committees of Seaton and Colyton, the Honiton Road Hauliers Association, Beer Pumpkin Group, Bovey House Hotel, all the Women's Institutes, Seaton and District Music Club, the British Legion, the Axe Yacht Club, the Pony Club, Branscombe Players, local Social Clubs and the pubs, Anson House of Colyton Grammar School, the Beer and District Deep Sea Anglers, the Buffs, the Inner Wheel, the three runners in the London Marathons, the Exeter Male Voice Choir, Devon and Cornwall Police Band, a Town Councillor, Mrs. Trevett-Humphrey, who did a sponsored flight over the sea on the end of a parachute – but the list could continue for many pages.

A great deal of money was given privately, always with a wish for anonymity. Some donations were large, some small. A special memory of mine is of an elderly lady who met me in the town, and emptied all her small change into my hand 'for the hospital'. It amounted to 58p, but as valuable and welcome as a cheque for thousands of pounds.

Each gift had a purpose. Beer Salvage Committee gave to the Building Fund. The Masons bought the heart monitor, the Rotarians furnished the conservatory. Surely, never have people banded together so closely in a common cause. Seaton's hospital is full of their love.

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play the bagpipes, the Guides sang carols, crackers were pulled and supper, provided and prepared by Committee members, was eaten. The Town Hall was packed to capacity. The 'Evening with Friends' party was not planned as a major fund-raising event but as a League celebration of a year of hard and successful work. That first party of 1986 celebrated a wonderful year.

Although experimental, that first Hospital Day collected over £1,000 mostly profit. The pattern has not been changed, although refinements have been added, such as the large 'geese' which patrol Seaton's town centre with their collecting tins. The Day has become more financially successful each year, and has become a major event of Seaton's winter.

The League tried another experiment, this time a commercial venture. A Charity Shop, staffed by Mrs. Jean Brewin and friends, was opened in Fore Street, Seaton. The lease was held by the League, and expenses and profits shared equally with Seaton Red Cross.

Early in 1987 the league Committee suffered a sad loss in the death of Mr. Tom Ashby of Beer. Tom had worked so hard, arousing enthusiasm for League support in Beer, and his vision of the future of the League had proved most valuable in Committee work. His place was taken by Mrs. Barbara Harding. She had worked with Tom in Beer, and this village has established a full Hospital Week, held each year, ending with a service in Beer Parish Church. Mr. Charlie Chapple does much work here.

By now Mrs. Mary Webb, the new Senior Nurse, was at work in her office in Harepath Road. At the League's request she prepared a list of suggested gifts for the hospital, for enquiries from would-be donors were coming into my 'office' (my dining-room in disguise) thick and fast. This list, known to Geoff and me as 'Mary's wedding-present list', was most comprehensive, ranging from expensive medical equipment to tiny details like flower vases and coat-hangers. Once the existence of this list became known offers flooded in.

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Building had started in January. Immediately the heavens opened. Rain fell. And fell, and fell. An underground spring flooded the site. Seaton Cricket Club had asked if they might be given the top-soil. Throughout the wet days of February, soil was carried from the hospital site in Valley View Road, down the Colyford Road, and along Court Lane. The resultant covering of sticky mud left along the route left no doubt in anyone's mind that a hospital was, in truth, to be built, and that, at last, somebody was doing something about it.

The £10,000 contribution to the cost of the Physio-Therapy Department was very soon collected. A new aim was needed. After much discussion of suggestions from the public, the doctors decided that four more beds, in the form of an Acute Ward, were urgently needed. Negotiations were begun between the League and Exeter Health Authority. Agreement was eventually reached that this addition would be made, on a 50/50 cost basis, and that the Ward would be built in the financial year 1989/90.

After under three years of life the League was in a strong position. It now had full local support, had achieved its aim of bringing a hospital to Seaton and District, and had added three facilities, the Physio-Therapy and the Occupational Therapy Departments, and now an Acute Ward. Although all that was apparent of these achievements was a muddy and flooded building site, the League Committee decided that the League had enough to offer to an Honorary Life President. One name only was suggested, and it was with enormous pride that the League of Friends could announce that the invitation had been offered to Dr. Jones, and that he had accepted. The news gave much joy throughout the area.

As soon as building began, the League and the Exeter Health Authority began to consider seriously an Opening Ceremony. At the tea-party on November 5<sup>th</sup>, the Chairman of the E.H.A. had suggested to me that the League might choose the Opener. After such incredible community effort, and the resultant close co-operation of the Exeter

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Health Authority in the realisation of Seaton's dream, it was obvious that these Opening was supremely important and special. Nothing but the very best was considered, and work began so that everything should be perfect in the possibility of our ambitious hopes being realised.

At long last the rain stopped. The hospital began to take shape. Walls began to rise, the windows were put into place, and one morning, a telephone call to me from the 'other Mary' told of the roof trusses being driven past her office window. Once these timbers were in place, we could see how our hospital would look, long and low, set against the background of the Haven Cliffs and the sea. Soon the roof tiles were in place. The Exeter Health Authority invited the doctors and the League Chairman and Secretary to go inside the building. We were warned to wear old clothes and Wellingtons. We crossed the mud on a plank, entering the hospital, for the first time, through what is now the garden door of Cormorant Ward's day-room. An army of plumbers, plasterers, electricians, even painters, was hard at work. The hospital was growing before our eyes.

A few days later, Mrs. Webb obtained an invitation to me to accompany her to Crediton, where that new hospital had been completed and furnished. The 'twin' to our own, it gave a picture of Seaton's future. It also showed several new ideas for gifts which could be passed to our donors. I was so grateful for this kindness. It helped me to understand the 'other Mary's' vision of her work in establishing a new hospital. In addition to her normal duties, she was busy with this huge task, choosing furnishing and furniture, colour schemes and decoration. The League worked beside her, fulfilling, very quickly indeed, all her requirements on her 'wedding-present list', and asking for further suggestions. This was a delightful, if very busy, time for me, matching donors to gifts, and meeting so many true friends.

One of these is Miss Cicely Benthann, who was the winner of a Milk Marketing Board competition to find the most popular milkman in

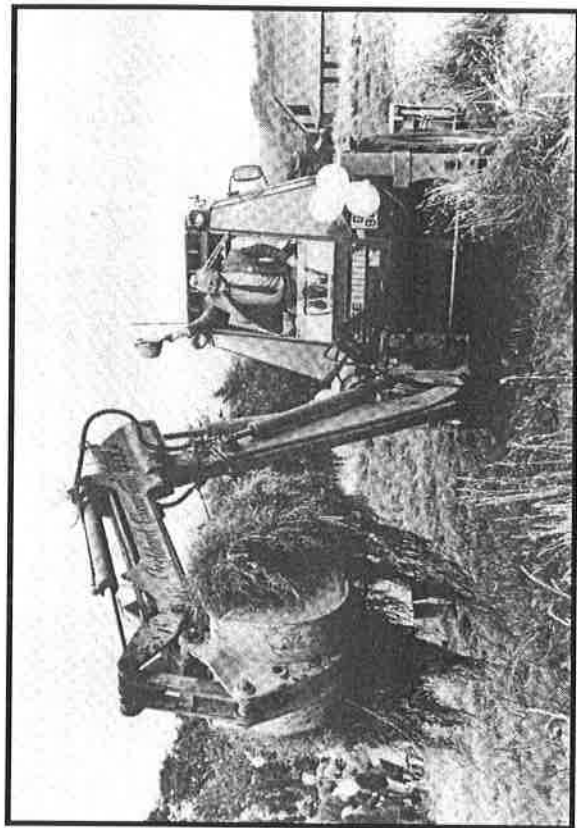
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H. R. H. the Duchess of Gloucester, Mr. Murray French, the Chairman of the Exeter Health Authority and Mrs. Mary Webb, the Hospital Matron, at the opening 10th May 1988

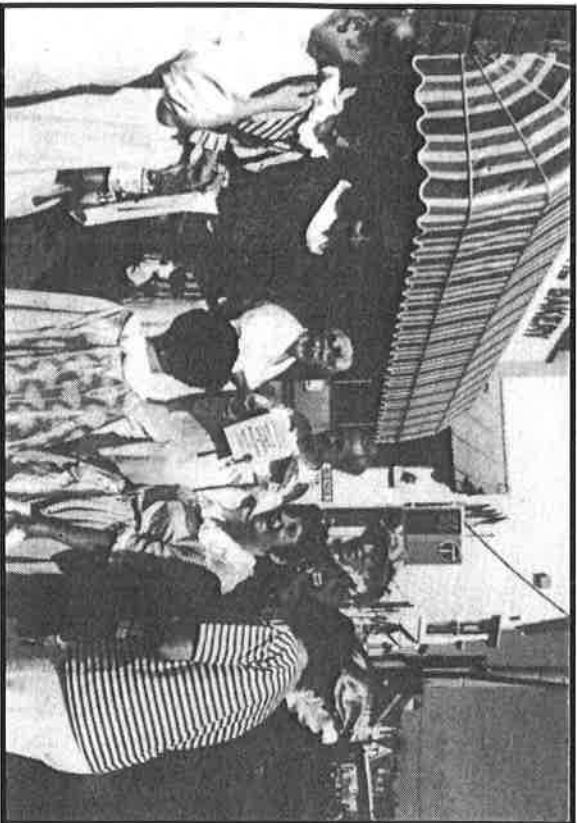
Dr. Jones opening Heron ward, the first phase of the Dr. Bob Jones wing, January 17th 1990 (photo The Midweek Herald)



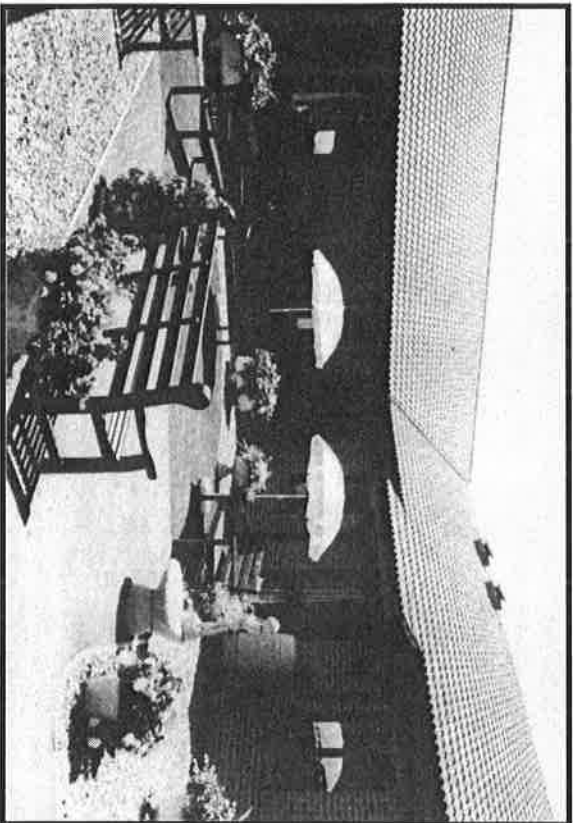
Dr Bob Jones turning the first sod, November 1986 (photo Colin Bowerman, courtesy of Pulmans Weekly News).

Seaton Lions bed push 1987

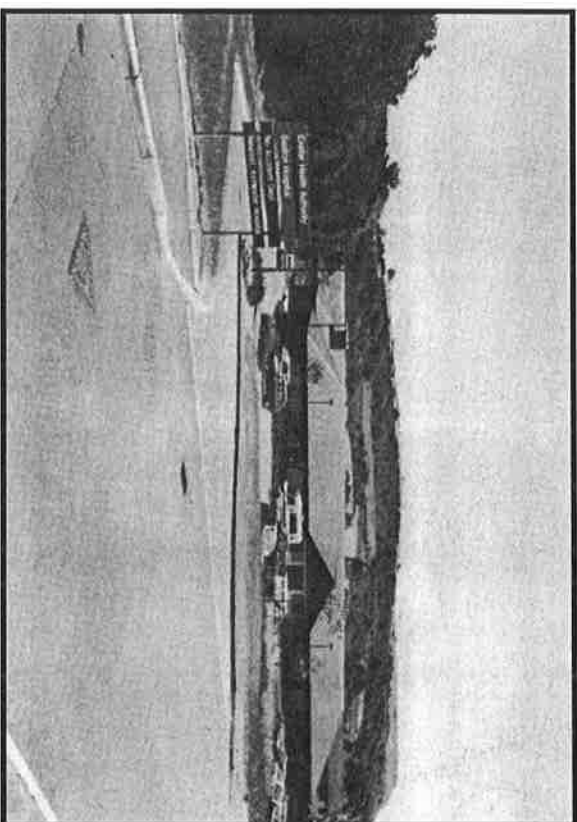




Rotary Club of Seaton, RNLI and the League of Friends Armada Fair 1988



The Hospital courtyard, furnished by donations



Seaton and District Community Hospital

