

EDITORIAL

The Vision of Ian Donald – 45 years of The Queen Mother’s Hospital

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The post war era of the 1950’s and 60’s was the golden age of the NHS – a time of innovation and idealism when anything was possible. Ian Donald was such an idealist and was truly a man of vision. When Ian Donald arrived in Glasgow from Hammersmith Hospital in London in 1954, he found an assortment of maternity services. Although there were five maternity units, Ian Donald described Glasgow as ‘one of the black spots in the country with regard to the provision of maternity hospital services’. He went on to make a case for a new hospital for reasons such as bad housing, making home births hazardous, and the University requiring to provide a proper academic unit in obstetrics since “not even the semblance of a professorial department could be said to have existed in Glasgow”. He first met Sir Hector Hetherington, the Principal and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Glasgow when he was head-hunted by him for the Glasgow chair. As an inducement to Donald to come to Glasgow, Sir Hector promised a new hospital. Later Ian Donald persuaded Sir Hector of the benefits of co-location of a new maternity Hospital beside the Royal Hospital for Sick Children. This foresight was key to Sir Hector convincing the Health Board of the merits of the Yorkhill site. Previously the Board had virtually decided that the new maternity hospital should be built in the grounds of Robroyston Hospital. As Ian Donald stated “Had it not been for the timely intervention by Sir Hector in periods of stalemate the hospital might for a long time have been no more than a tangled mass of drawings doomed to a dusty shelf”.

Thereafter the project to build the new hospital gathered pace. It was no surprise that it was Ian Donald himself who took control of the project. The sum of £800,000 was secured from the Health Board and the University then had to find an architect who would transform his revolutionary ideas into plans. The services of JL Gleave were secured, and the two men produced a new design of a 112 bedded maternity hospital which set aside many of the traditional patterns. The new hospital consisted of a central delivery block from which radiated four ‘wings’. At the far end of the hospital was the University Department, surmounted by the Tower Block containing living accommodation for the resident medical and nursing staff. The construction of the hospital by Crudens Ltd of Musselburgh began in early 1961. Ian Donald was involved with each phase of the building and even managed to appoint his own ‘master of works’, Miss Marjory Marr, who had been his ward sister in Rottenrow; she later became the first matron of the new hospital. In 1961 Ian Donald wrote a detailed article for this journal for their series on hospital planning. He also introduced several revolutionary measures – open visiting, a new records system and the weekly perinatal conference.

The Glasgow public were captivated by the construction of the new hospital; its progress was frequently featured in the newspapers. The hospital was hailed as Glasgow’s first complete, all new hospital, since the beginning of WWII. Having been permitted to name the hospital after Queen Elizabeth, The Queen Mother, The Queen Mother’s Hospital opened its doors on the 11th January 1964. Patients and staff expressed widespread enthusiasm for the new facilities.

The official opening by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother took place on 23rd September 1964. She showed a keen interest in the hospital and described it as “unique in being combined with a children’s hospital, thus giving care where needed to the newborn baby, infant and growing child”.

During the years of the hospital planning and construction the birth of a new medical speciality was progressing rapidly. The development of ultrasound as a clinical imaging modality was the concept of Ian Donald and his team at Rottenrow and the Western Infirmary. Their most important paper was published over 50 years ago in the *Lancet* of 7th June 1958. Following this Ian Donald had noted that clear echoes could be obtained from the fetal head. The arrival of James Willocks in 1958 allowed the clinical application of fetal cephalometry with an A-scan machine to be investigated in the wards of Rottenrow. Patients referred to James Willocks as “the man wi the wee barra” as he pushed the A-scanner around the wards of Rottenrow on a trolley! The article in this edition by Nicolson and Fleming gives a clear account of the contribution made by James Willocks.

On a cold foggy night of the 12th January 1962, the results of the investigations were presented to the Royal Society of Medicine. Despite Ian Donald collapsing with acute dyspnoea half way through the presentation the audience left incredulous at the potential for this new investigation.

The move to The Queen Mother’s Hospital in 1964 allowed Donald and his team to further expand their studies. A steady stream of doctors from all over the world spent time in the “Sonar” Department at The Queen Mother’s Hospital. Rightly Ian Donald was hailed as one of the founding fathers of the speciality of Fetal Medicine, now recognised as a sub-speciality of obstetrics worldwide.

It was fitting to witness the Donald family open Scotland’s first dedicated Fetal Medicine Unit at The Queen Mother’s Hospital in 2003. Since then the debate about the re-provision of maternity services in Glasgow has been keenly debated. The final outcome, ultimately agreed by everyone involved, was the goal of achieving the gold standard of triple co-location. Thus the future of maternity services in the South and West of the city will eventually have co-location with adult and children’s facilities on the Southern General campus. In its 45 years the staff of The Queen Mother’s Hospital have made a considerable contribution to maternity care in Glasgow and beyond. Over 50 years ago, Ian Donald’s vision achieved significant advances in maternity care. 2010 will herald another new chapter for Glasgow’s maternity services, a time for further vision and innovation.

References

Ian Donald - a memoir. James Willocks & Wallace Barr, RCOG Press, 2004 ISBN 1 904752 00 4