

Recollections by Ida “Brom” Bromley, 2011

It became a tradition that the physiotherapists did a routine dance to music in each ward between 8.00 and midnight each New Year's Eve but I am not sure when it began. It was certainly happening during my second stint there i.e. between 1962 and 1977 but I cannot remember if we did it during my first spell there (between 1954 and 1960). But once we had begun it then it happened every year. Patients who were back in hospital for some reason looked forward to it and told the others what to expect but they never knew what routine was to be performed because we all kept it secret. We practiced after work in the big gym and had a look out to see that no one took a peep at us!

It was always the physiotherapists who did the act. I guess we were the ones who mostly took the patients out to the pub or the cinema in the early days. It was often the first time the patient had been outside the hospital and they felt confident with us as we know how to deal with the chair or any bladder upset etc. After we had taken them out they felt more confident to go with their families. Remember in those days patients were in bed for weeks most for 12 weeks so getting up was quite an event and going out along a road just as daunting.

I cannot remember exactly which years the photos were taken. I was in the pasha one but I had given them up by the belly dancing one (I did the music that year) , so the belly dancing must have been later 1970s, I guess. It would be impossible to do these things now because of Health and Safety. We may be safer but we all of us kids and adults are not permitted to have fun anymore. (Whoever heard of having to wear goggles to play conkers?) I am afraid that alcohol, unless prescribed for medical reasons, is not allowed on wards and as for taking into the wards all that foreign stuff like tinsel, straw and odd materials that we all wore – no way.

Apart from the Health and Safety issues the unit is now divided into smaller sections. In those days patients were in the long Nightingale wards, which were awful for some things but also good for some things – like mostly everything else! The mostly young chaps all joked a lot with each other across the ward and with and about the staff. The physiotherapists were popular, did not get offended and gave as good as they got for the most part so the patients really enjoyed seeing them dressed up and if identity was difficult all the better for their guessing games. Although discipline about appointments for treatment etc. was strict - because Poppa [Guttmann] used to say that these patients were going to have to be disciplined if they were ever going to work again - there was also a lot of fun and life seemed to be a lot jollier somehow and rather more relaxed.

I do not think the consultants of to-day know their patients in the same way that Poppa did. I do not know whether they would come to parties on the wards but I rather think some at least would. In the old days of course consultants used to carve the turkey on the ward on Christmas day but that has not been done for years.