

Miss Nellie Fantham

C.T. 1958

By Carl Whiteley



Miss Nellie Fantham working on her embroidery at Christchurch hospital. C.T. Photos

On tuesday I met a person who has spent nearly half her life in hospital. She is 77-year-old Miss Nellie Fantham, who is described by nurses as one of the happiest patients in Christchurch hospital.

A Christmas atmosphere was still present along the corridors to Ward E where Miss Fantham has occupied a corner bed near the window for the past seven years.

The patients, I was assured, had enjoyed a very happy Christmas. For some it was their first experience of Christmas in hospital, but for Miss Fantham it was her 34th. And all have been spent at Christchurch.

She had a happy time this Christmas and was pleased to have a visit from the Mayor and Mayoress, Coun. and Mrs. J. W. Richardson, and the Deputy Mayor and Mayoress, Coun. and Mrs. K. L. Smith.

"STAFF ARE WONDERFUL"

"But all my Christmases have been happy ones", said Miss Fantham. "The staff are wonderful and I have always been very comfortable. The time has passed quickly".

Miss Fantham has had rheumatoid arthritis since 1918 which she contracted after having Spanish 'flu while in London. She was born in Birmingham but came to Bournemouth about 1902 as a nurse-companion. After a few years in this district she went to London where she became ill.

She then decided to return to Birmingham to be near her relatives during her illness. "I never realised at that time that my illness could last so long. I thought a short spell in hospital would put me right and then I would be free to do all the things I had planned", she recalled.

WANTED TO TRAVEL

"I had always wanted to travel abroad and had some relatives in Canada whom I wanted to visit. But after spending about two years in three Birmingham hospitals I was told that I would have to stay in hospital for an indefinite period."

As Miss Fantham had been resident in Bournemouth for over three years Christchurch Hospital was her "settlement" and she was therefore eligible for admittance.

She was brought to Christchurch on October 16, 1924 and was placed in what was then a new block opened only four or five months previously.

Here she met Miss G. Holland who was the first nurse in charge of the new block. They struck up a friendship which has lasted ever since. Miss Holland, who lives in Fitzmaurice Road, Christchurch, is now retired, but visits Miss Fantham twice a week.

Miss Fantham stayed in the new block until 1938 and then spent varied periods of time in other sections of the hospital before moving to Ward E in 1951.

CLOSE COMPANION

One of her close companions in Ward E is Miss Edith Miller, of Beaconsfield Road, who has been in Christchurch Hospital for the past 22 years.

Miss Fantham has seen many patients come and go and speaks very highly of the many nurses who have attended her over the years. She has praise also for members of the Hospital

League of Friends.

The hospital, she says, has changed very little. There have been redecorations, new beds and furniture but apart from the new surgical unit which was added in 1957 the main buildings have remained much the same.

EMBROIDERY

Miss Fantham has been confined to bed for the past ten years but is allowed to sit up and spends most of her time doing embroidery, reading and writing. She also enjoys listening to the radio and watching television.

She feels that hospital life today is rather more official than in the old days but "there is still the personal touch about the place".

Miss Fantham said the secret of her happiness was in her will to keep active and retain interest in life.

She is the life and soul of the Ward and, said Ward Staff Nurse Mrs. V. Monkhouse, she is never idle and never grumbles.