



The Old Hospital's Third Anniversary Report to the Community

This June, the Old Hospital celebrates its third anniversary, giving its Chair the opportunity to report to the community on the progress we are making to turn the Old Hospital into the heart of the Southwold and Reydon community. This was always the vision - to replace what had been lost with something different that still benefits people of all backgrounds, helping to bring together our sometimes-fragmented community.

As I look back, what stands out is how at every turn, good has emerged from apparent setbacks. Difficult though the closure of the nursery was, one year later many more young families are benefiting from the Family Tea Club whilst Southwold Primary School's numbers have received a welcome boost because of the influx of children into its pre-school. For elderly residents, Barclays Bank's decision to open a branch at the Studio, which replaced the nursery, has been a boon. Internet banking is fast and efficient but if you're not used to navigating the on-line world, using a phone to manage your money can be dispiriting and confusing. So it is understandable that many people, especially the elderly, still prefer face-to-face contact and this is what Barclays provides at the Studio. Now, it is possible to take Mr. Bus to the Old Hospital, pop into Barclays for your non-cash needs, and obtain cash from the Post Office, a five-minute walk away. Loneliness has been described as a 'hidden killer.' Throughout a journey like this, people are making social contacts that relieve isolation. It is also possible to combine a trip to the bank with a coffee at The Canteen and a visit to the library. You can even read the library's editions of the Times of London and East Anglia Daily Times in the café.

Last month, Barclays was joined by Citizen's Advice, which now holds fortnightly surgeries at the Studio on alternate Fridays between 10 am – 12 noon. The next will be on the 6th and 20th June. There is no need to make an appointment. Citizen's Advice is the 'go-to' place to obtain impartial advice on debt, benefits, housing, employment, care, consumer rights, or navigating the NHS. One local resident described its advisors as 'well good, easy to talk to, and willing to help.' Also at the Studio, you can find three different types of 'movement for well-being' courses. Under pressure from my children to live forever, I have taken up Somatics, which has been unexpectedly life changing. One of the groups, Health Through Yoga, with funding from the National Lottery, is offering a completely FREE six-week course that includes refreshments and a chance to chat with the instructor afterwards. With only 8 spaces available, priority is given to applicants with lower incomes. We would encourage anyone with an interest in further sessions to contact hello@healththroughyoga.co.uk or sign up to our newsletter

on www.oldhospitalhub.co.uk to keep abreast of upcoming activities.

Most pain is quickly forgotten but not the agony in 2021 of negotiating the library's lease with Suffolk County Council. Locals will remember the library's old home - now converted to a disability friendly affordable bungalow by the Fox Trust. It was an early 20th century Assembly Hall, which, when the library moved into it many decades ago, was shared with a family who kept 20 chickens in the rear garden. With the building's lease coming to an end, the professional librarians dreamt of a purpose-built modern space that would enable them to expand membership and activities and might even include a dedicated Children's Corner. SCC was insistent, however, that a library in Southwold would not be viable, and that the move into the Old Hospital could not go ahead, unless the rent was pegged at the same low level. This means that a large part of the Old Hospital's charitable mission is providing a subsidised rent to retain Southwold Library, which also means that we are regularly fund-raising not only for our own activities like the Family Tea Club, our educational and nature-friendly allotment, the Sunday Community Lunch, and our Holiday Club for local children, but also to support the library's affordable rent. Right now, we are planning our annual round of summer fund-raising events, which will again feature an auction and the popular Flea Market and Hog Roast. We hope that people will be as generous as last year when a goodly amount of the monies raised came from donations. To make it easier for people to give, we are adding a DONATE button to our website.

For those with private pensions, there is an incentive to spend them down in our life time now that the government has made them subject to inheritance tax and, with every donation to a charity made from your pension pot's income, you get a credit that reduces your income tax while we would get a 25% increase in what you've donated. We will explain more about this in a follow up newsletter to subscribers. You can also contact jessica@southgen.co.uk to learn more.

When the library moved into the Old Hospital, local children celebrated by planting worms and sunflowers in our garden. Worms are now plentiful and the sunflowers self-seed. This year, the Family Tea Club children sowed sweet peas instead. In May, they planted these out at the base of a willow wigwam donated by Chris Webster (head of the Geography Fieldwork Academy) who began cultivating willow on his farm during Covid-19 and now employs two local lads in his start-up company, Heritage Willow.

Almost every day, I am at the Old Hospital to tend its garden and check on the well-being of The Canteen team. (Like the theatre, hospitality is hard, stressful work and our new all-local team are doing a remarkable 'no drama' job of improving turnover and keeping the quality high.) This gives me a chance to talk to many people, both local and visitors. Recently, a couple from Cambridge told me how much pleasure they got from the garden. It made them feel happy and content. They described it as a corner of beauty. Inspired by the story behind the Old Hospital, they donated several free meals through the Canteen's Pay It Forward Scheme.

In its third Spring, the garden is looking its best, giving pleasure through its constantly changing character. Nature does amazing things like dropping Red Campion seeds at the entrance to the library's path. Ten Red Campion plugs cost £17.50 on the internet. The birds gave them to us for free. Charlotte Clark reports that at least three customers a week thank her for the garden. 'You should be thanking the Old Hospital,' she replies. Landscaping was a critical piece of the renovation design. We wanted to connect the building with St Edmunds Green opposite (which locals used to call Hospital Green) and also restore something that has been lost not just in Southwold but all over the country as charming front gardens have been paved over for parking and easy-maintenance. This not only produces a soul-destroying streetscape; it further reduces our diminishing supply of natural habitat for birds and pollinators.

Fund-raising was always at the heart of the original old hospital from its earliest days right down to its closure when brand new beds, as yet unwrapped, which The Friends of Southwold Hospital had paid for, were still in place. We are planning a permanent exhibition on the hospital's history, to open in September 2025, which will highlight the service of the people who worked there in every capacity over the generations. Our research led us to the grave of its first doctor, Richard Wilson Mullock, who is buried in the church yard in the plot closest to the hospital. His obituary read in part, 'He devoted himself heart and soul to the hospital and its welfare was his chief hobby.' Now his grave is obscured by a tangle of ivy and fielelm. We hope to clear it as one of our summer activities for local children.

I see continuity down the ages between the ethos of Dr. Mullock and the spirit in which the Old Hospital's staff and Management Committee approach the work of our charity. We are not perfect. We grumble, gripe and make mistakes but we also listen, self-critique, and correct our course when we've gone off-piste. A case in point is the celebration of our second anniversary, a high-priced feast that was just 'not us', and, unsurprisingly, was sparsely attended. Thereafter, we vowed that the furrow ploughed by The Canteen should be grounded in community. This year's third anniversary celebration is a family style BBQ. So put Sunday 22nd June at The Canteen in your diary, and whether you come or not, give a thought to how fortunate we all are to be living in a peaceable and caring community.