

The Achievement

*'Let us then be up and doing with a heart for any fate, still achieving,
still pursuing, learn to labour and to wait.'*

Henry Longfellow



On that memorable day in July 1980 the visitor to 56, London Road, Canterbury, on entering the drive, would immediately be confronted by an imposing Victorian house called Plender. Progressing further, one came across an attractive three-bedroomed cottage, formerly the stable block, and immediately beyond this stood a one-storey building in a beautiful two-acre garden.

Built in 1965 as a sanatorium to house the boarders at the King's School who had succumbed to minor ailments or accidents, it now stood empty but with an indefinable air of peace and welcome which immediately enveloped us all.

Light and sunny, and a long way from any preconceived gloomy idea of hospitals, it was indeed the dream setting I had envisaged for a hospice. Incredibly the realisation dawned that this amazing property was ours.

Slowly we paced the building, gradually assimilating the immense possibilities and mentally trying to envisage the transformation. Together we explored the cottage and discovered the gracious rooms awaiting us in Plender, some of which were already used by consultants as private consulting rooms. Happily, a few stayed on for a while, renting the accommodation from us until such time as the Chaucer Hospital was completed.

At the top of the house were three flats, also rented out, but that still left us with considerable space and the headache of a building to maintain, over and above the immediate need to redevelop the sanatorium to fulfil the criteria for the hospice.

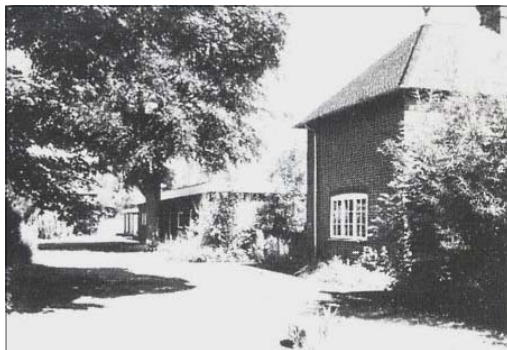
We desperately required a base from which the whole operation could be mounted until the unit was ready to open, and thankfully we realised the enormous potential which Plender offered. A phone was quickly installed and we set about finding a part-time secretary, some

furniture and a typewriter. In August Miss Barbara Hodge, recently retired to St. John's Hospital following a career as a secretary to the Archbishop of Canterbury at Lambeth Palace, was temporarily persuaded out of retirement and became the first salaried employee of the hospice. Very calm and precise, I think she must have wondered what mad existence she had entered upon after the presumably dignified, orderly life at Lambeth. Despite the chaos she remained at her temporary post for a year, during which time she dealt courteously and graciously with everyone in circumstances which were hardly ideal.

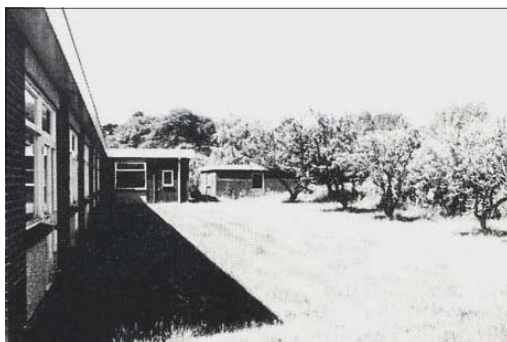
Funds now stood at £114,500, and Francis took the bold step of inviting people to give us interest-free loans to ease the situation. This proved successful as by mid-August the project had raised £164,000 and the final bank loan of £25,000, to finalise our purchase, was repaid by the end of the month. The age of miracles had not passed.

Fred Mynot was working non-stop to produce a draft plan for alterations and adaptations to the property, which would meet our constantly changing requirements. None of this was going to be possible without replenishing our now non-existent bank balance and it was decided to hold an open weekend at the hospice in September so that the people of east Kent could see for themselves just what their efforts had provided. More important, they would also discover how much had yet to be accomplished.

The weekend was planned for 27th-28th September. The architect's finalised drawings were ready for display, numerous stalls were



Above: driveway to the main entrance, with the stable block on the right. Below: side view



positioned in the various rooms and a shopping list of essential equipment was drawn up to tempt those wishing to donate specific items. These ranged from the necessary bed pan steriliser at £1,200 through Kings Fund, beds at £382 each, to bedside lamps at £15. A local nursery produced a ground plan of the proposed garden layout, detailing and quantifying the plants and shrubs needed.

A wine and cheese party was organised for the Saturday evening and the whole weekend would culminate with an open-air ecumenical Service of Thanksgiving in the gardens, conducted by the Bishop of Dover on the Sunday afternoon.

For some days prior to the event, I had been worrying about the risk of a break-in at the hospice, which was completely hidden from view, and would contain quite a tempting quantity of merchandise ready for the weekend. Finally, in a fit of desperation late on Friday evening, I persuaded my long-suffering husband that it would be better if we slept on the premises.

It was a perfect, moonlit night and as we turned the car into the drive a magnificent fox calmly loped across the lawn. We stood in silence just drinking in the sheer beauty and tranquillity of our surroundings, so quiet that we could have been in the heart of the country, and I pondered again our immense good fortune.

We then turned our attention to locating a suitable spot in which to camp and finding some extremely ancient mattresses in a cupboard, laid them on the floor in one of the wards and settled in sleeping bags to await the dawn.

Thus we achieved the fairly uncomfortable privilege of being the first occupants of Pilgrims.

The weekend was a tremendous success and folk arrived from all four corners of the county to share in the general pleasure. We experienced true 'hospice weather' a phrase now popularly coined due to the fact that the sun invariable shone at events held to aid our cause. We finally emerged, exhausted but exhilarated, having raised £2,000, plus firm promises for a considerable amount of equipment and most of the shrubs for the garden.

As a result of the wide interest that Pilgrims Hospice was now attracting the *Kentish Gazette* produced an illustrated, four-page spread in the *Town Crier*, detailing the progress made to date.



**Open Weekend at Plender
27th-28th September 1980**

Top: Ann Robertson and Francis
Watts with the original plans.

Right: Ann Robertson with
Peter Heartfield (right) and
Dick Stevens, with a model of
Pilgrims Hospice in its
original form.

Bottom: ecumenical clergy
conduct the open-air Service of
Thanksgiving

