Alan Rix - Hospital Administrator

We have much to thank Mr Alan Rix for – both in his career as Hospital Administrator at Savernake Cottage Hospital for 26 years and now for his memories. He is a very sharp and witty 82 year old gentleman without whom the 2009 History Project would never have got underway. Alan wrote the first History of Savernake way back in 1966 – the Centenary Year, and that was the basis of our research.

Alan had an impressive range of duties and responsibilities at Savernake – being responsible also for Marlborough Children’s Hospital and Pewsey, Burderop and North View Hospitals as well. His day to day responsibilities included supplies, finance, personnel management, staff accommodation, patient services, fire precautions, security, health and safety, planning, maintenance and development of services, public relations, voluntary services and liaison with local authority staff and services such as education and social services…. It leaves you breathless. He carried out the above duties between 1956 and 1982. He also has an enormous sense of humour – and looking at the above I would imagine he would have needed one!!

Val Compton
2010

Here is a short flavour of his memories

When Alan started at Savernake he was given a room in the Nurses’ Home where Sister O’Grady was the Nurses’ Home Sister. The nurses were up to playing tricks and one night put the hospital model (pretend patient on which to practise) from the Training School in his bed. Alan decided to get his own back and give someone a fright by putting the model, for an unsuspecting person to discover, in the bath!

During a hot Summer, a tramp spotted an empty bed in the Maternity Ward. He climbed in though an open window when all the patients were asleep. Folding his clothes, he then climbed into bed and enjoyed a good night’s
sleep. However, he was soon spotted in the morning by the long white beard that flowed over the nice clean sheets! Matron Blackwell was very cross and even more furious when someone gave the story to the press!

The nurses had an annual dance at the Goddard Arms, Old Town Swindon. The music of the time was Rock n’ Roll and Matron Blackwell decided to join the nurses for a lively dance. Someone spotted her and there she was in the press once more – described as the “Rock n’ Roll Matron”. She was less than amused and was teased for a long time with the title.

Alan came in one morning to find a list of the “Brought in Dead” to the hospital Mortuary, which served the whole town at the time. The hospital morgue was used prior to the undertakers taking this over. On the list that day was a “W J Lewis” – which was also the name of Alan’s line manager. This caused quite a lot of assumptions and black humour, when it was confirmed to definitely not be his boss!

Sir Anthony Eden lived near the Pewsey area and soon after he resigned made a visit as a patient to Savernake. Dr Bob Wheeler had arranged at Sir Anthony’s request that he should come in quietly for an X-ray and blood test – with no ceremony. He slipped down to the Path Lab and then went for his X-ray. A Sister from Lavington Ward recognised him and alerted Matron Blackwell to the fact of his presence in the hospital. Matron bustled down to the Waiting Room. In there sat Jeremy Tree, a well known local race horse owner/trainer. Matron approached him – asking if he was Sir Anthony’s chauffeur! Once again the story was written up. By the time the eminent gentleman left the hospital, nurses were summoned to give him a farewell suited to such a personage!

The bus shelter outside Savernake was the province of the Porters when it came to cleaning. However, it was also a favourite resting place with tramps. One morning the Porter, John King, duly arrived to clean, and finding a tramp asleep in a corner, cleaned all around him and left him be. As he was about to leave a voice said, “Thank you very much – we don’t generally get service like this!!”

Savernake was amongst the first – if not the first hospital to have telephone trolleys.

In Alan’s time, most services were taken care of in-house: the meals, the engineer’s duties, building maintenance, indoor window cleaning, gardening, training of nurses, Porter on site living in the Lodge, laundry service, sewing, Chapel of Rest etc. It was a self-contained and thriving little cottage hospital, often ahead of its time and always cutting edge. Never afraid to move forward to embrace the changes for the good, but surrounded by a community always prepared to fight when they felt the changes were detrimental to the service.