

The Tale of Two Plaques in Commemoration of Wartime Surgeon and GP

— Peter Sherred —

As reported in the Newsletter of November 2018 (no. 93 p. 31) on 17th August 2018, the life and work of Gertrude Toland, the well-known surgeon and Dover GP who saved the lives of many Dunkirk soldiers and civilians during World War Two, was commemorated when a plaque in her memory was unveiled in Buckland Hospital by her son Gordon Toland. The Rotary Club of Dover had taken the initiative in arranging for a replacement plaque in memory of his mother to be placed in a location accessible to members of the public in the new hospital. The reference to a replacement plaque arose because the Rotary Club of Dover had commissioned a memorial plaque in the Rotary year 1990-1991 to this outstanding lady which was unveiled by the then President of the club near to where she operated in the former Buckland Hospital and was the first fixed memorial to Gertrude Toland's work. When the former hospital was disused and then demolished enquiries were made as to the whereabouts of the plaque that had been erected in the presence of Gordon Toland and his family only to be told that in the demolition of the former hospital it had been lost. With the replacement unveiling in 2018 it seemed that the chapter was closed on a memorial to Gertrude Toland in the hospital so that her life and works were retained for posterity by the replacement plaque.

Out of the blue in December 2020 the President of the Rotary Club of Dover, Tony Cook, received a telephone call from the Maintenance Manager Estates at Kent and Canterbury Hospital, Malcolm Stubbersfield, to advise that the original plaque had been recovered among other

effects that had been transferred to Canterbury from the former Buckland Hospital. After consultation it was agreed that it should be placed alongside the replacement plaque in the entrance area of the current Buckland Hospital. Mr Stubbersfield attended to this immediately. On Thursday 17th December 2020 President Tony Cook and myself, as the President who had unveiled the original memorial plaque, attended at the hospital at the invitation of Mr Stubbersfield, to view both Rotary plaques in place side by side and below historic pictures of operating theatre activity presented by the League of Friends of the hospital. The thanks of the members of the club for his excellent work of discovery and of mounting of the original plaque were given to Mr Stubbersfield. Tony Cook said "It was a pleasure to see the two plaques, commissioned by the Rotary Club of Dover, side by side in Buckland Hospital commemorating the life of Gertrude Toland, a surgeon heroine of wartime responsible for the saving of so many lives. Together they make a fitting tribute to a quite remarkable woman".

Fulsome tribute should be given to the Health Trust for remedying the loss of the first plaque by offering a location for a replacement and great credit is due to Malcolm Stubbersfield for his recovery of the original and for ensuring its siting beside its replacement. Gordon Toland has been advised by the club of the resurrection of the original plaque and its placing beside the replacement in the hospital. Next time you have occasion to visit Buckland Hospital go and visit the site of the plaques which are located to the left of the Reception Area on the right-hand wall.