

# *Moorfields Eye Hospital*



The London dispensary for curing diseases of the eye and ear was opened in 1805 by John Cunningham Saunders (1773-1810).

The impetus for the formation of the world's first specialist eye hospital seems to have been an epidemic of trachoma. This is a form of potentially blinding tropical conjunctivitis which was brought back to England by British troops returning from the Napoleonic wars in Egypt.

The number of patients seeking treatment steadily increased, forcing a move to a larger site in 1822 and finally to its present main site on City Road, central London, in 1899. At this time, the first specialist departments were set up (x ray and ultra violet treatment rooms). At this time, the hospital was still operating as a charity and each patient received an admission card that read:

'This letter is granted to the applicant in being poor. Its acceptance therefore by anyone not really poor constitutes an abuse of charity.'

In 1935, after a public appeal for £120,000, the George V extension was opened. This provided a new outpatient department, a new ward and an orthoptic department.

During the Second World War, the hospital opened its doors to general surgical cases and most of the ophthalmic patients were evacuated out of London. Moorfields received a direct hit from a 'doodlebug' in 1944 and suffered serious damage. This was so extensive that the hospital was nearly pulled down and rebuilt on a green field location. However, the site was rebuilt and in 1946 the City Road Hospital amalgamated with the Royal Westminster Ophthalmic Hospital, the Central Eye Hospital and took on the clinical facilities for the medical school for the University of London.

With the formation of the NHS in 1948, Moorfields lost its status as a voluntary hospital and in 1956 was officially named as 'Moorfields Eye Hospital'. In 1950, the Sixteenth International Congress of Ophthalmology was held at Moorfields and for the first time ever TV cameras were installed in the theatres to demonstrate surgical techniques.

Moorfields redeveloped the site in the late 1980s, allowing for the expansion of more specialist areas. The Trust now runs outreach community eye clinics at nine other sites where it provides a range of ophthalmic services.

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