

History of The James Tudor Foundation

The origins of The Foundation can be traced back almost 100 years.

During the 1920s the Voluntary Hospitals in the UK were in crisis due to an acute lack of funding. In Bristol, James Tudor had been deeply concerned about the perilous financial state of the Voluntary Hospitals and the consequent lack of access of the population to medical treatment. In 1926, at a meeting between representatives of the Bristol Royal Infirmary, Bristol General Hospital, and various works committees, the Bristol Medical Institutions Contributory Scheme (BMICS) was conceived, and James Tudor was appointed as its Honorary Secretary. The principal aim of the scheme was “to raise funds for the upkeep of all institutions on the list and on behalf of those entitled to benefit, making provision for the whole or part payment of the charges for maintenance of the same.”

Regular contributions from workpeople and citizens generally would provide an assured income for the hospitals and, in return, contributors and their families would receive hospital treatment without charge. A contribution of one penny a week entitled the contributor, his wife, and children to hospital treatment.

In 1935, the committee of BMICS launched an Extended Benefit Scheme, later renamed Bristol Contributory Welfare Association (BCWA) which provided contributors, for an extra penny a week, a cash payment of one guinea a week while they were being treated in hospital.

With the advent of the National Health Service in 1948, BCWA continued as a non-profit making Provident Association providing benefits for both NHS and private patients and, in the ensuing decades, achieved phenomenal growth, becoming the fourth largest Provident Association providing medical insurance in the UK.

In the early 2000s, underwriting results for BCWA had decreased enough to lead the Board to conclude that the future interests of its members would be best served if the Association was sold. In 2004, The Hospital Savings Association, later known as Simply Health, acquired the membership rights and the consideration for the purchase, some £26 million, was transferred to the newly established charity, The James Tudor Foundation.

The principal object of The Foundation, namely the relief of sickness, is in direct alignment with BCWA and BMICS before it, so that, from 1926 to the present day, there is an extraordinary continuity of voluntary service rendered by three separate but closely linked not-for-profit organisations dedicated to the relief of sickness in all its many forms.

Family connections

James Tudor retired from in 1948 and was succeeded at the helm by his son-in-law, Geoffrey Wren, who had worked for BMICS since 1936. On Geoffrey's retirement in 1976 he, in turn, was succeeded by his elder son, Martin Wren, the grandson of James Tudor, who had joined BCWA in 1971. The sale of BCWA in 2004 coincided with Martin's retirement and he became the first Chair of The Foundation's Board of Trustees. He remained in this role until his death in 2016. Over three generations, the family has collectively devoted almost 100 years of service to the relief of sickness.

Following Martin Wren's death in 2016 we were pleased to welcome his wife, Stephanie, who had been a member of The Foundation since 2006, to join the Board of Trustees, and his brother Philip as a new member. Keeping the family connection alive for the younger generation, we are delighted that Martin and Stephanie's sons, Edward and William have also become members.

Stephanie Wren is the current Chair of the Board of Trustees, elected in April 2023.

James Tudor died in 1952. He was not only the Chairman but also the founder of BCWA – the creator of a concept which was adopted by contributory schemes throughout the country. His name was inextricably linked with access to healthcare, and he dedicated his life to selfless voluntary service. He would surely have been proud to see a charity bearing his name and committed to the relief of sickness.

