



Voices from the Village of Hope

Mr David Coles (born 1931)

After treatment for TB at two sanatoriums in Devon, Mr Coles came to Papworth in the 1950s to find work in Papworth Industries.

Injection

“Well, I’ll never forget the first injection. Mount Gould didn’t have any nurses in, they were all male orderlies and they were sort of ex-Army staff I think they were, or ex-services anyway, and there was an old man, a real old military operator, an old man called Mr Pitt.

And he came along, he said, ‘I’ve got to give you an injection, son’ he said. ‘Now, I want a nice taught, hard muscle to put this in.’

So, course, being like a fool, I had fairly strong legs anyway cause of all my walking on the milk round, and my muscle, I bunched it up as hard as I could. When he hit me with that needle, I hit the roof. And the old boy in the next bed said,

‘Don’t take any notice of that silly old sod,’ he said, ‘just relax your muscle boy,’ he said, ‘and let him stick it in.’

And I had that for, one every other day. They were experimenting with it and they weren’t sure what the dosage had to be”

Embroidery

“It was a bit monotonous at times because we didn’t have anything much to do. There was no television. I took up embroidery. One of the nurses said to me, ‘You know, you ought to do something’. ‘Cause I wasn’t allowed to sit up, you see. Some of the guys used to do marquetry, some used to do tapestry. I was laying down flat all the time and it was very difficult to do anything laying down flat. And you could do embroidery, I had a ring and you could sit there and stitch away, and I started doing that, and I thought it was a great pass timer and that’s why I started doing it. It really worked. But you used to read, and do crosswords, listen to the radio, there weren’t much on the radio in those days, you only had old headphone things with two programmes on, the Light Programme or the Home Programme, and just nothing to do. But we were all in the same boat, so you just got on with it.”

Eating away

“When you were positive and the TB was eating away at you, you dreaded going for your X-rays in case you got the news that you were much worse, especially when you started to get up and get about because you used to have to have an X-ray a week or two after you got up to see if the extra strain was causing any ill effects on your chest. And waiting for those results to come back, cause if they came back and something had gone wrong you were back-tracked to be back in bed again. One or two old boys had to do that, something had gone wrong with them, but in my case I went from strength to strength and never looked back. We used to walk miles.”

Cards

“In those days you had cards with stamps on it, and every week they stuck a stamp on your card, your employer. Of course I had no stamps on my card, and when you showed them you stamp card and you had no stamps, they said, ‘Well, where have you been? Why haven’t you got any stamps on your card?’

‘I’m sorry but I’ve been ill.’

‘Oh, what’s been the matter with you?’

‘I’ve had TB.’

They couldn’t get you out the door quick enough. And you were more or less unemployable, they wouldn’t take you on. And then someone from the Ministry of Labour came and spoke to me and mentioned Papworth Village Settlement and when he explained it all to me, I thought, well it’s worth giving it a try. ... And so I came here, to Papworth.”

Hut

“A wooden box with a door! There was no windows. There was just a four-sided hut with a wooden floor, and it had like stable doors on the front. It had a flap which opened up and clipped up with two things on the side. And it had the other two doors looked out that way. More or less the same as the one you’ve got as a model up by the pond, but not as good quality as that one!”

South Park

“It was horrible. As I said before, it was very cold. There was nothing in there apart from you had a little wireless of your own, there was nothing in there to occupy your time. It’s the same on the hostel. We had a snooker room up there which we used to use quite a lot, and if you played darts and that sort of thing. The actual food was not very great. I remember once when we were up at South Park, all of us up at South Park we used to work in one of the factories

or other. There were several factories and everybody up there worked in one or other of them. And we decided one day, because the food was so bad, we wouldn't go to work, we went on strike. That worked for a little while, it improved for a little while. They got the message, but it didn't last. The food was pretty rough."