

After many years of service to MS Therapy Centre (Tayside) Ltd, Hilda Innes was persuaded to put down her memories on paper prior to retirement and also pulled together a number of photographs which had been taken over the years.

## **The History of the Unit - “Hilda’s History” and beyond.**

In August 1982 Tayside Friends of ARMS officially began treating patients in an HBO Chamber. By this time there was a long waiting list but the first groups were selected by drawing names from a hat. Rev T Milroy of St Rule’s Church Monifieth carried out the draw.

**Group A** 1100 - 1300

**Group B** 1330 - 15.30

**Group C** 1600 - 18.00

**Group D** 1830 - 20.30

Each Group had their treatment on 20 consecutive days (excluding Sundays which were used for cleaning). They were in the Chamber for approximately 1½ hours at a pressure of 33 feet. It was nearly a year later that Dr James suggested lower pressures could be used and the time cut to one hour twenty minutes.

Before this momentous day there were many months of preparation. Charlie Butterworth was an assistant to Dr Philip James, a specialist in diving medicine at the Wolfson Institute, when he was treating a diver in an HBO Chamber in a garage at Fernbrae Nursing Home.

Because Dr James and Charlie had studied research done in America on the use of HBO to treat Multiple Sclerosis they decided to treat some patients in the Chamber. Daphne, Charlie’s wife and Brian McCoombe were the first.

When their results were reported on Television there was immediate interest from people with MS in the area.

Dr James directed enquirers to Daphne and Charlie and a group met in their home in Newport. This led to a public meeting in the Mary Slessor Centre when Tayside Friends of ARMS was inaugurated.

*Our parent body, ARMS (Action and Research for Multiple Sclerosis) was set up in 1974.*

John Simkins, chairman of ARMS attended our inaugural meeting and in his speech said that the setting up of the very first MS Therapy Centre was the most hopeful development in the management of the disease for years.

Office bearers elected at the first meeting of Tayside Friends of ARMS in the Mary Slessor Centre were - Chairman: Gordon Gillies, Secretary: Hilda Innes and Treasurer: Robin Haston.

It was decided at this meeting that no charge as such would be made for treatment but a donation to cover costs would be requested.

It was made clear that no one would ever be refused treatment because they couldn't afford it.

In July 1983 the donation requested was £4 and eventually when plans were being made for extending into the neighbouring unit, it was increased to £5. Unit 12B was rented from the Council and a second-hand Decompression Chamber was bought for £3000, though the company sent part of this back as a donation. It was delivered free of charge because the lorry driver's wife had MS.

The money to buy the chamber, a compressor and other equipment was raised from interest free loans (£6000) from members and supporters.

These were paid back in no time as a result of the many generous donations we received.

Various donations of bits of furniture were scrounged and vans were borrowed for transporting them.

We started life in this big empty and not very clean industrial unit. We had a small office and one toilet. The furniture consisted of a large table usually covered with Charlie's tools,

etc. A small corner was reserved for an ancient typewriter, which was mainly, used for “thank you” letters and begging letters.

We did have a telephone, which did a bit of “begging” as well. Margaret Pullar organised a small card table and an electric kettle – even in those days the cup of tea and a chat were important!

We had some old church pews, some odd chairs and a roll of old carpet .



***The first chamber .***



***Charlie at the controls***

Dr Davidson assessed the first patients before treatment and again six months later. The results were encouraging. As a result of a broadcast from Radio Tay, volunteers were recruited, donations sent and more MS people contacted. Eventually the news of our Centre spread throughout the country and we had requests literally from all over the world.

Daphne was appointments administrator, first of all using her Home telephone and eventually the Centre telephone.

Another founder member, Jean Sandeman, used the experience she had from dealing with students at Dundee College to arrange accommodation for patients from out of town. After several months in Unit 12B, we moved “lock, stock and Chamber” to a smaller Unit which was half the size and half the rent.

As a result of a contact with one of the managers of Manpower Services, we were allocated the free services of various men who were trained as operators. John Milne was in charge of these volunteers.

At a meeting on 12 January 1983 the Treasurer reported that all the loans had been paid back and that there was £8000 in the bank. It was agreed that a donation be sent to ARMS in London and a similar amount to research locally.

Also at this meeting it was agreed that we needed more space and a possible return to Unit 12B was discussed.

Again we were given the services of various tradesmen from Manpower Services and a disabled toilet and a small office were added as well as a room for physiotherapy.

A new purpose- built Chamber was ordered at a cost of £12,500 and once it was installed and a compressor room built, the large back door had to be sealed.

Then there were problems of access with the new Chamber as the door was not at floor level. Eventually, to solve this problem, the roof was opened up and a large crane lifted the Chamber clear so that a hole could be dug to sink it into the floor.

The original Chamber went on loan to the new Centre in Edinburgh.

On 31 August 1984. with all the renovations complete, Unit 12B, was officially opened by Frank W Ross of Levi Strauss (UK) Ltd.

We had the services of John Milne and two other Chamber operators from Manpower Services, until the new Centre at Aberdeen requested the same help and were told that they were not entitled to it and that Dundee should not have had it.

That was the end of this free service for us but, fortunately, we were able to employ John Milne as a full-time operator and we could still depend upon our own volunteers for the evening sessions.



***John Milne with Aileen Anderson a nurse/counsellor***

Physiotherapy started with qualified volunteers until the first one was employed in January 1987 and this service has gone from strength to strength.

We were delighted when we added Yoga to our activities.

We actually “kidnapped” a teacher when she came to the Unit on 1 June 1986 to hear a talk given by Jan de Fries and she was not allowed to leave until she promised to start a class.



***A physiotherapist, with a patient***



***First Yoga Class with Doreen***



***Yoga Class with Margaret***

At one of our early Yoga sessions when we were all relaxing, lying on the floor wrapped in rugs and in complete darkness, a delivery man opened the door and the air was rather blue as he thought he had come upon a mass suicide.

In the late 1980's Kingspark School was approached for permission to use their specially adapted pool. Margaret Bainbridge, and various other helpers over the years have successfully kept the swimming going there.

It has been particularly beneficial for those confined to a wheelchair.



***A founder member, relaxing in the pool.***

David Pullar, another founder member, worked in the office for a time. One of the things he organised was a very spectacular rally in the City Square with Dundee Pipe Band, a fire

engine, Dr James, councillors, MP's, various local dignitaries as well as a good representation of our own members and supporters.

A group of cyclists were on a fund raising effort round all the Scottish Centres. They were cycling round Scotland with a Charter to be signed by the provosts of all the places they visited. Charlie Farquhar, a local councillor, signed on behalf of Dundee.



***City Square Rally***



***David in the office***

At a meeting on 12 January 1983, Freda Powrie, was officially appointed fundraiser and social committee organiser.

Many memorable events were organised – a Supper Dance in the Angus Hotel geared for the slightly older age group as opposed to the Disco organised there earlier by the Pullar family.

Coffee mornings were at least twice yearly events. There was a Christmas Raffle every year and various concerts in different venues.

The highlights were definitely the Barbecues held at Balkemback Farm courtesy of Gia and Ken Duncan and family.

A huge marquee was erected in a field - specially cleared of cowpats! George Jarron, a local butcher, supplied food and his friends were the volunteer cooks. All had a great time! Gordon McRae, the regional manager of ARMS, came to one of these barbecues and was very impressed.

After a few not too successful Jumble Sales, it was decided to go ahead with a charity shop in Hilltown. That lasted for about a year and later on we had the opportunity of a week in a very well equipped shop in the new Overgate Centre.

We managed to get a yearly let there for some time and raised a lot of money as well as enjoying serving our customers – a rather varied lot!!



***Overgate Charity Shop***

Another annual fund raising event was the Fun Run organised by the management and staff of the Hawkhill Tavern.



*Aileen, a nurse counsellor;  
Freda, a fundraiser;  
and Sandra a member,  
taking part in the Fun Run  
In their "Noddy" car*

Right from the beginning we realised that, as well as volunteer operators, we needed ladies to help with cups of tea and chat, so the “Social Ladies” became a reality.

We don’t call them that now, but they still do a great job, as do the volunteer operators who do the evening and Saturday sessions.

Bill Buxey has been a volunteer with us since the beginning and is now also the full-time holiday relief operator.

Every year, around Christmas, we had what we used to call an “Operators Night” with a buffet supper, drinks and the opportunity to chat and to thank the volunteers.

This event now includes all volunteers who help in any way in the running and funding of the Centre.



***Operators’ Night:***

At the 10th Anniversary, we celebrated with an Open Day, it was announced that an extension was to be built to provide a quietroom for the Nurse Counsellor to consult members in private and a library where literature would be readily accessible.

The “quiet room” was officially opened on 11 March 1994 by Lord Provost McDonald and dedicated to the memory of Charlie Butterworth, who died in a pot holing accident not long after the family moved to Oban.

Charlie and Daphne Butterworth had both helped to set up the purpose-built Centre in Oban and Daphne continued to work there until she became too disabled to do so.

She died in January 1997.



***Dr James and Daphne at the Oban Centre Opening***

By the time ARMS was declared bankrupt in 1993, as a result of an over-ambitious fund raising effort, fortunately, Tayside Friends of ARMS along with the majority of the 60 plus MS Therapy Centres in Britain had formed themselves into limited companies and, therefore, were not too badly affected by the demise of ARMS.

Although regional committee meetings had been held for some time, it was decided at a meeting in Aberdeen to set up the Scottish Association of MS Therapy Centres.

At a committee meeting on 24 May 1993 Dr Davidson attended and explained his research project.

At a further meeting on 31 May 1993, it was agreed to donate £10,000 to this project. He did report some time later that the research was continuing with another grant.

Originally we got advice from the ARMS dietician and in 1986 a diet group was set up. A few years later it was realised that we would be better served with someone local to give us diet advice.

Pam Hynd, one of our founder members produced recipes and general advice about a healthy diet. Her Information Sheets are sent out to new members and she is always ready to give individual advice. Her talks are well attended and her practical demonstrations using the microwave are very popular.

Our Continence Adviser visited the Centre monthly for some twenty years providing a much valued service, however, when she retired it was felt that this service was now being adequately offered by NHS and she was not replaced.

Starting in October 1998, our Reflexologist offers all new members the opportunity of "taster" treatments and then offers continuing treatment.

Over the years the number of professionally delivered therapies and services we can offer has grown to include physiotherapy, chiropody, diet advice, yoga, reflexology, swimming, aromatherapy and of course nurse/counselling.

When an enquiry comes in, an Information Pack is sent out and an arrangement made for an appointment with the Nurse Counsellor

In a matter of days, counselling can be given, treatment in the Chamber organised and advice given on all the other services we provide along with all the latest information on MS from the Internet and other sources.

All this has been achieved without any official grants.

We are proud to have been self-supporting since the beginning but are very grateful to all those who have supported our own fund raising efforts.

We have had many generous donations from Charitable Trusts, local firms, and sponsorship events and from the general public.

Just after Hilda Innes relinquished her post as Chairman, she was invited to Buckingham Palace to receive an MBE.

That was a wonderful experience, but Hilda insisted she was not being honoured personally, but as a representative of all those involved in running the Centre over the years.



Hilda was succeeded as Chairperson by Allan Blyth in 1998.

Allan Blyth served on the Committee for several years as Property Convenor, prior to accepting the somewhat unenviable task of filling Hilda Innes's shoes as the new Chairman in 1998. This experience enabled him to project manage the Herculean task of extending into Unit 14.

The first problem with this was the difference in height of floor levels – Unit 14 being 18 inches higher than Unit 12a and there was just enough room and no more to accommodate the necessary ramp access.

The pace and amount of work carried out to modify Unit 14 was governed by finances until a much appreciated extremely generous bequest was received and allowed things to proceed with greater impetus.

The end result of two years hard work resulted in providing a wonderfully equipped physiotherapy room, two consulting room, two toilets geared for disabled people a large public area for holding meetings, yoga sessions etc, storage space and a canopy over the back door entrance from the car-park to provide shelter from inclement weather for people being dropped off.

These improvements made a huge difference to the Centre and along with managing all of this, Allan kept things ticking over nicely until he handed over the reins to Colin Armour in 2002.

Allan was succeeded as Chairperson by Colin Armour in 2002.

Colin recalls the concern that existed prior to Hilda's retirement. Hilda wasn't just a Chair but also fundraiser, administrator, chamber operator, volunteer helper and undertook many other duties as they arose. Colin agreed to serve as Vice-Chair to support Allan and Ian Bell was appointed as our first part-time administrator to deal with the ever-growing volume of paperwork and research related information that was becoming available.

During 1999, Colin had noticed that a lottery-funded project was being run by the now dissolved 'Disability Scotland' that would supply an internet-available computer for the use of 'communities' that were successful in their application. Enlisting the help of Ian Martin, the very comprehensive application form was completed and submitted, which proved to be successful and we received our computer and our first internet link. At the time, the very limited office space available precluded extensive use by our members, but this was to be addressed as soon as possible.

When Ian Bell retired, we had already reached the conclusion that the amount of work involved required a greater number of hours and Carole Morrison was appointed in March 2002 on a three day, 18 hours per week basis.

For some time, the idea of an additional Hyperbaric Chamber had been mooted but in the end, it was decided a larger purpose built chamber would be more appropriate, particularly given that we had an offer to purchase the existing chamber from another Centre in Bandor near Cork. Following a visit to the premises of Specialist Plant in Wellingborough, Northants and inspecting a chamber they had just completed, Colin took a CD ROM supplied to him back to Dundee. After viewing this, the committee decided to give Specialist Plant the order for a replacement unit.

As part of the removal of the previous chamber and installation of the new required contractual work to alter the size of the floor opening, as well as opening up the roof, we decided to introduce roof-lights to brighten up our dark interior. The whole operation, which ran to time, necessitated the closure of Peddie Street and diversion of bus-route to allow access by the mobile crane. Fortunately, the high winds kept away and the whole operation was documented on video for future viewing. This work had by necessity required temporary closure of the unit, but we managed to keep this down to just two weeks.

At our AGM in 2002, it was decided to increase our annual subscription from £4 to £5 per annum to help defray the additional costs it was taking to run the Centre. Allan stood down at this point but as already indicated, he agreed to help whenever he could.

Members and visitors had always commented on how friendly and welcoming the Centre had been, despite its drab décor, but after the structural works, which had been carried out both on the new Unit 14 extension and to accommodate the new chamber, an overhaul was clearly needed! A sub-committee was formed to look at this with the overwhelming brief that nothing was to be done which might compromise the relaxed, non-clinical, non-threatening atmosphere that pervaded and that any further closure was to be kept to a minimum.

A member of the sub-committee was able to convince the Principal of the Interior & Environmental Design course at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art to include our refurbishment as one of the projects for their second-year students. Keen to incorporate their ideas, as well as members' comments from a survey conducted to evaluate our service provision, the sub-committee ensured we maximised the potential of the premises by making structural alterations to utilise space, both efficiently and cost-effectively. The extent of the changes required meant a further period of closure was essential, but on top of the many "Essentials", key factors in our planning were to ensure this closure would be kept as short as possible and to retain a welcoming, relaxed and friendly atmosphere that was even more disabled-friendly.

After looking at likely costs and alternatives, we appointed Keith Robertson of Care-Fit-Design to work with us in producing our desired layout. The work included an efficient kitchen area, more ergonomic and spacious social areas, two well-appointed offices and consulting/therapy rooms, top-quality toilet facilities and automated access/exit. This culminated in a successful re-opening celebration with Lorraine Kelly officiating, where we were delighted that Mr Douglas Kerr, brother of the late James and Irene Kerr whose generous bequest had made this possible, was able to be present and see Unit 14 officially named "The Kerr Suite". We were pleased when Mr Kerr later wrote to express his approval of the ways in which we had used the bequest. We were also delighted that Lorraine took the amount of time that she did, not only to cut the cake, but to mix and meet with our members for which we were very grateful.

At the same time and after moving the members' computer to a more accessible area, we were able to dedicate this area "The Ian Martin Computer Area" where we are now incorporating computing/internet access and tuition.

Today the Centre goes from strength to strength with available therapies including; Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy, Specialist Nurse Counselling, Physiotherapy, Chiropody, Reflexology, Aromatherapy, Dietary Advice, Computer Tuition and Swimming in a nearby adapted pool.

During 2007, we are celebrating 25 years since our inception. We were awarded a Civic Reception by Dundee City Council in which we tried to publicly acknowledge the many hours of effort put in by so many volunteers which has made our 25 year operation possible. As members of M S Therapy Centres (Scotland), we agreed they could hold their AGM here in September, rather than the usual location. As the first MS Therapy Centre in the UK, we were pleased to have accepted an invitation to an event held by the M S National Therapy Centres (representing England and Wales) in the House of Lords during July. The future holds many challenges but we are certain that with the continuing help and goodwill from members, their families, our staff, our volunteers and the local community, we will continue to operate successfully.