

## **The Edinburgh Medical Missionary Society and the Nazareth Hospital Runa Mackay**

### **What was the aim of missionary work in the country where you served as a Scot?**

I served in the EMMS Hospital in Nazareth an Arab town at the moment in the State of Israel our aim was to care for the sick of Nazareth and the surrounding Arab villages in Galilee and to share our love of Christ,

### **What were the core values being pursued in missionary work in your country of service?**

We were not church , we worked with all the local churches and worshipped with them as we shared in the spreading of the Gospel among the local Christians and the local Muslims.

### **What were the main emphases in the spiritual and intellectual dimensions of missionary work in your country of service?**

I worked in a hospital so the main emphasis was in caring for the sick but we also trained nurses and had medical students from Medical schools from around the world doing their 'elective' periods with us. Ultimately we looked forward to the day when the local Palestinians would be running the Hospital.

When the Edinburgh Medical Missionary Society was founded in 1841 the concept of the medical missionary was quite new, no missionary society had a medical missions policy and the term medical missionary was not used. The founders of the EMMS were inspired by Dr Peter Parker of the Medical Missionary Society of China. He addressed a meeting while he was a guest in the house of Dr. John Abercrombie, the leading consultant physician in Edinburgh at that time. EMMS became the first Western missionary society to confine its interest to medical missions

The aims of the Society can be summarised in the following way:

- (1) To encourage the acceptance of the principle of Medical Missions, namely that qualified Christian medical men and women have an important role to fulfil in Christian missionary work.
- (2) To provide bursaries for medical missionary students and to supplement their medical studies with training in theology and evangelism, together with practical clinical experience in a Home Medical Mission.
- (3) To provide medical, social and spiritual care for the sick poor of the Cowgate area of Edinburgh on an outpatient and domiciliary basis.
- (4) To collect and circulate information and news of medical missionary work at home and abroad.
- (5) To assist medical missionaries at work overseas by providing assistance and grants of drugs and equipment needed for their work.
- (6) To initiate the establishment of Medical Missions at home and overseas and to transfer these to local management as this becomes possible and appropriate.

I believe these aims have largely been fulfilled.

Medical work in Nazareth was started in 1867 by Dr. Kaloost Vartan, an Armenian doctor who qualified from Edinburgh University with the help of a bursary from the EMMS. After the massacre of Syrian Christians by the Turkish authorities in 1860 the London Society for Sending Aid to the Protestants of Syria was set up and Dr Vartan was sent as their agent to Beirut and in 1861 he was asked to go to Nazareth to open medical clinic as there was no medical centre between Beirut and Jerusalem at that time. In 1865 the EMMS adopted him as their agent and he opened the first Nazareth Hospital in a small rented house in 1879. The work has continued in Nazareth since then up to the present day.

Nazareth is to Christians a very special place but it has no history. It was never mentioned in the Old Testament nor in the Talmud nor by Josephus and was even despised (John 1:46), but it was the town where Jesus grew up with Mary and Joseph at time of the Roman Empire until He began His earthly ministry. It sank into obscurity although the Crusaders made it a Bishopric and it eventually became part of the Ottoman Empire, then of the British Mandated Territory of Palestine until 1948 when it was included in the State of Israel. The Mayor of Israel surrendered to the Israeli army to avoid bloodshed and Ben Gurion, because Nazareth was revered by the West, ordered there to be no destruction.

I served in the Nazareth Hospital from 1955 until 1975 and then with the Israeli Ministry of Health until 1985 in the Arab villages in Galilee.

I was not one of the EMMS medical students but I worked in the Cowgate Dispensary as my father had done when he was a student in 1895 so I had grown up knowing about the EMMS and the Nazareth Hospital but had never imagined spending most of the rest of my life in the Middle East – I went out in 1955 to do a 6 months locum for a friend who was working there,

In 1948 the City of Nazareth was a small town with a population 70% Christian Arab and 30% Sunni Moslems. The largest group of Christians were from the Greek Catholic (Melkite) Church with the next largest the Greek Orthodox. There were also Roman Catholics (Latins) and some Protestants, the Arab Episcopal, American Southern Baptist and the Brethren.

The Hospital on the Hill, as it was known, or the 'English Hospital' to distinguish it from the Scottish Hospital in Tiberias which had opened some years later than the Nazareth Hospital, had 120 beds caring for the people of Nazareth and the surrounding villages of Galilee. There were some Arab doctors in the town but in 1955 we were a group of expatriate doctors and nurses. We were non-denominational, not interdenominational as one's denomination was not important, we were all Christians. No one was ever turned away, neither Jew nor Arab, neither night nor day, but they were asked to pay what they could.

Every day at 7 o'clock prayers were said in every ward and before every operation prayers were said for the patient and if we were slow in doing it the patient invariably asked 'are you not going to pray?' When later some local Christian doctors joined the staff morning prayers were discontinued as it was

feared we were 'preaching' to a 'captive audience' – although I had never met any opposition – prayer is so much a part of Islam the Muslims expected it in a Christian Hospital. Ministry to the patients then became the responsibility of the Chaplainancy team.

We worked as closely as we could with the local churches. As we were not a church, ourselves, we expatriates were encouraged to attend the local churches in Nazareth. I went to the Arab Episcopal Church and for a number of years served on the Majma, the local Church Council. Since Christchurch had been set up by the Church Missionary Society, members of the church did not have to be confirmed members of the Anglican Church.

Although we were not a church the time came when we needed somewhere to meet other than the Outpatients Waiting Hall where services could suddenly be interrupted by the arrival of a patient with all his relatives. It was decided therefore that we should build a Chapel. This proved to be a great blessing for meetings of all kinds including the annual Women's World Day of Prayer as it was seen to be a 'neutral' venue.

Then arose the question of having a chaplain. This was a hotly contested issue. Some of us believed that ours was the privilege and the task of spreading the love of Christ by our work, our lives and our words. However it was eventually decided that we should appoint a chaplain – primarily to care for the well being of the expatriate and local staff but the different chaplains appointed interpreted the job as they saw fit and they were indeed a blessing to many both in and outside the Hospital, especially as they all mastered Arabic.

The primary aim of the Hospital was, of course, to provide the best possible care to our patients. We became recognised as the District Hospital by the Israeli Ministry of Health. The Laboratory was among the top ten for accuracy in the world. We pioneered new services as the need became obvious, among them were Family Planning, Renal Dialysis and Palliative Care.

Nurse Training has been a priority from the very beginning. In the early days it was quite basic and given by the medical staff, but then we recruited Nursing Tutors and the students received Practical Nurse Certificates which were recognised by the Israeli Ministry of Health. There is now a purpose built nursing school in the Hospital compound, fully staffed by local nurse tutors and teaching to SRN grade and hopefully to BSc in the future.

The training in the Hospital extends to the doctors, and medical students from Israeli Medical Schools can come for experience. Students from Medical schools from around the world can come for their 'electives' to Nazareth or receive grants from EMMS to go to other Mission Hospitals-the 3rd World Mac scheme set up when the EMMS no longer had Hostel for medical students nor gave bursaries as the UK Government helped all UK students.

One of the aims of the EMS from its inception was to initiate the establishment of Medical Missions at home and overseas and to transfer these to local management as this becomes possible or appropriate.

This aim has at last been accomplished for the Nazareth Hospital. There are now no expatriate staff. The administration and the medical departments are headed by local Palestinian Israelis, as is the Nursing School. The Chaplaincy team also consists of local men (as it happens at the moment!! There have been local Bible women in the past). The Hospital is now run by an Executive Board composed of senior Hospital staff and some local people. At the request of the Board, the land and buildings are still owned by EMMS, as a protection from Israeli government expropriation and a few expatriates also serve on the Board for the same reason.

The population of Nazareth is now 30% Christian and 70% Muslim as the Muslims have larger families and many Christians have emigrated, The majority of the villages in Galilee are Muslim, a few are mixed and there are also several Druse villages. The question of integrating Muslims on to the staff of course arose and has had to be handled very sensitively. The Board members are all Christians as are the heads of all the medical departments except for the genito-urinary and renal dialysis units which are run by long standing members of the staff who are Muslims. There are two Jewish consultants on the medical staff who came especially because it is a Christian Hospital. All staff accept that it is a Christian Hospital and have come because of the Christian ethos. At times of conflict the staff have always worked amicably together for the good of the patients.

The Nazareth Hospital now belongs to the people of Nazareth. It is a beacon of light shining in what is so often a very dark Middle East

As the responsibility for running the Nazareth Hospital is now that of the local Executive Board EMMS decided to look to its fifth aim – ‘to assist medical missionaries by providing financial assistance and grants for drugs and equipment’. The EMMS is now a partner of Emmanuel Hospital Association in India and is known as Emmanuel Health Care and is also working closely with, and raising funds for, hospitals in India, Malawi and Nepal.

For more than 160 years the Edinburgh Medical Missionary Society has endeavoured to fulfil the vision of the Edinburgh doctors who met together on November 30 1841 and inaugurated the first Medical Missionary Society in the western hemisphere.

I would like to express my thanks to the Rev Dr John Wilkinson for dates and information gleaned from his book ‘The Coogate Doctors’ The rest of what I have written is from my own experience.

Runa Mackay