

History of New Forest Hospital Radio

1973 - The LHR Organisation was formed following a discussion between Mike Race, Steve Hesketh and Barry van Geffen at the Wagon & Horses at Walhampton. With about 6 other interested people they distributed 1,000 leaflets around the streets of Lymington asking for donations and records.

1974 - The Hospital authorities agreed to an old paint store at the Infirmary being used as a radio studio. A number of largescale fund-raising discos were held over the next few years to raise money to prepare the studio and buy equipment.

1975 - An application was made to the Post Office for land lines to relay programmes from the Infirmary. Members started to convert the old paint store and equip it as a studio, record library, and an office, later to become a computer room

1978 - Approval was finally received from the PO for the land lines. The big day came on Christmas Eve when the first official programme was broadcast to the Infirmary day room via speakers.

1979 - The LHR Organisation became a registered charity with the name Lymington Hospital Broadcasting Association. The 1st AGM was held under that name, and Sunday programmes were relayed not just to the Infirmary but also by land line to Linden House, then a home for the blind.

1980 - With further land lines complete, weekday evening broadcasts to the main hospital started on a pilot basis. The League of Friends purchased the amplifier and distribution equipment for the hospital and paid for the land lines.

1981 - In March a full daily service commenced with a library of about 5,000 records, 8 years after the first idea. It offered a whole range of music, news, information, requests, interviews and special feature programmes.

A competition was run in the New Milton Advertiser and Lymington Times to choose a name for the new hospital radio station, with a prize for the best entry. It was won by a New Milton resident who suggested Radio Link. This was thought ideal as hospital radio links patients with the outside world.

1984 - The record library and broadcasting studio in the former paint store at the Infirmary were switched around so that free space in the library was used to provide a larger studio. This took the best part of the year but broadcasts continued for most of the time.

1987/8 - A decision was taken to review the vinyl and cassette recordings held in the record library and re-catalogue. A small team, with Irene Grist and George Samuel, undertook the painstaking task of cleaning and listening to each record and manually typing up a catalogue over the next four years, cross referenced by artiste, title and genre.

1988/9 - The first Compact Disc player was purchased and CDs were gradually introduced into the record library in preference to vinyl LPs.

1991 - A computer was purchased with a specific hospital radio software package to computerise the record library, with ability to call up tracks by title, artist or record number as well as to search for a particular word or words in a song title. The transfer of data into the new record library database was completed by 1993.

1995 - An outside broadcast took place between the Borough Arms and the studio using borrowed equipment. It was not a complete success but a worthwhile experience.

2000 - The first Mini Disc player was purchased and all jingles transferred from cartridge. Over the next three years many frequently played vinyl LP tracks, all essential 7" singles and some tracks held only on cassette were transferred to MD. LPs were reduced by about two thirds. All singles and pre-recorded cassettes were removed from the library.

2001 - BT discovered and disconnected the land line to Linden House for which they had not charged for some years. Rather than pay the back money, Linden House was provided with a Mini Disc player and their show was recorded for them on MD. They were then able to play it several times each week.

2003 - The Infirmary closed in March. A store room in the main hospital was to be converted for use as a studio but was not ready so full broadcasts had to be suspended in May. Radio Link was off air for 5 months for the first time in its history except for the Linden House show which Tony Clark recorded every week in a spare bedroom at his home.

2004 - The new studio in the main hospital was officially opened in January by Mike Guy, presenter of the Linden House show for 22 years until his retirement in 2003. This was followed by an open day for members, their families and invited guest. Discussion took place with the Solent Mead care home in Lymington to provide a similar request programme to Linden House. A pilot show was recorded in October and from early 2005 it became a regular fortnightly recorded show but not heard in the hospital.

2005 - Planning started for the next studio in the new hospital at Ampress. An external consultant was appointed to advise on equipment and furniture. A studio capable of unattended automated play-out, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, was proposed and accepted at a cost of £37,500. This included two specialist computers with Myriad playout software. A fund raising campaign was mounted mid-year.

2006 - In April Tony Clark undertook a 24-hour sponsored solo broadcast which raised over £3,000. Other fund raising initiatives exceeded all expectations. As a result of this and generous donations by a member and the League of Friends the full cost of the studio was met without reducing existing capital in the bank. It was decided to rename LHR as New Forest Hospital Radio for the new hospital.

Access to the new hospital was given in late November and by mid December the new studio was in and working. The last broadcast to the old hospital took place on the evening of Thurs 28th Dec 2006. The next day the library and other studio items were moved between hospitals at the same time as the patients.

A check around the wards by the request collectors revealed many beds without headsets connected and of those that had them many had either no sound or interference. Sadly plans to start broadcasting to the hospital wards on 30th Dec had to be abandoned.

2007 - During January further problems were identified with the hospital patient entertainment system. The first broadcast to the hospital eventually took place 5 weeks late, on 3rd February. However, the shortage of headsets continued, many beds did not work and eventually on 26th March it was decided to suspend broadcasts again. After a rethink and major work by the company that installed the patient entertainment system, broadcasts were eventually restarted on 1st Oct after just over 6 months off air. For this period the studio continued to be used only for the recording of the weekly Linden House and fortnightly Solent Mead shows and presenters' familiarisation with the new Myriad computerised playout system.

Basil Trask, who retired in November 2006, aged 87, after 17 years' service with LHR, died on 31st January. Funeral donations came to hospital radio and this money, around £1,200, was used to install in the studio a computer network with broadband internet connection. It was decided to name the studio the "Basil Trask Studio" in his memory.

Hampshire County Council decided on 31st August to close the Linden House care home and by the end of October all residents had been relocated, many to Solent Mead. After 26 years our request shows for Linden House came to an end with two special shows for which Mike Guy, the original presenter, returned to join the three regular presenters. The Solent Mead show became a weekly show broadcast to the hospital.

2008 – This was the first complete year of broadcasting from the new studio. Membership numbers exceeded 50 for the first time ever after a recruitment open day. A NFHR website, introduced on a pilot basis during 2007, was made available to the public to provide a full range of information about the station.

2009 - An appreciative past patient left NFHR a considerable sum of money in her will which made possible a number of studio enhancements. These extended into 2010 and provided for future unattended automated broadcasting day and night to supplement our evening request shows.

A Yuletide event in Lymington High Street provided our first opportunity to broadcast live to the public for seven hours, sharing the facilities of the PA provider for the event. Several new membership enquires resulted.

2010 - A second presenter's computer was provided in the broadcast studio, primarily for internet and network access when on air, but also for pre-recording shows in Adobe Audition for subsequent editing and playback.

Ceiling speakers with local volume controls were installed at NFHR expense in agreed public areas of the hospital, in preparation for later daytime broadcasting. They would allow daytime programmes to be heard by staff, outpatients and visitors.

HRH The Princess Royal visited the hospital for the second time in three years, Four of our officials were introduced to Princess Anne and talked informally with her over a cup of tea before the ceremony.

2011 - A major new project initiated in 2010 reached its conclusion a few days ahead of the target date of 1st May 2011. This provided another new computer, the sixth in the broadcast and production studios, as well as other equipment, to enable:

- Automated 24 hour, 7 days-a-week broadcasting, including a repeat of the previous evening's live request show, pre-recorded 1 hour specials, computer generated music shows and selected popular shows from BBC Radio 4 and Radio Solent.
- Streaming of our broadcasts via the NFHR website so that members involved in producing or presenting shows could hear and monitor our broadcasts at home.

This was one of the most significant projects ever undertaken by NFHR/LHR as it resulted in 24 hour round the clock broadcasting which had been an ambition for well over a decade. By the end of the year 38 pre-recorded or live specialist shows had been scheduled, as well as programme variations for Remembrance in November and Christmas.

2012 – Following the failure of one of our two Myriad computers, in regular use since 2007, it was decided to replace both. This and other equipment repairs resulting from electrical problems in the hospital created a number of challenges for the studio management team. The owners of the building reimbursed NFHR with £1,000 for the cost of repairing damaged equipment. Membership numbers exceeded 60 for the first time.

2013 – A 32 hour continuous live broadcast involving most presenters and a studio open day were held in March. This celebrated LHR/NFHR's 35th year of broadcasting and raised £2,500 which was donated to the hospital towards the purchase of specialist equipment to allow sleep disorder diagnostic work to be undertaken in Lymington.

NFHR broadcasts were made available handheld computing devices or mobile phones via the Tune In Radio application. It was decided to remove all remaining vinyl LPs from the library as they are seldom played and any tracks requested which are not available on other media can be found on the internet.

2014 – A major computer upgrade was undertaken with a new PC for our automated 24 hour broadcasting, a move to Windows 7 and the very latest version of our Myriad computerised playout system.

2015 - Regular monthly shows were started for four local Colten Care homes. Each show is made available as a podcast on the NFHR website and downloaded by the care home for playout from memory stick on mp3 players.

NFHR hosted a Southern regional meeting of the HBA. A Monday Night Theatre was introduced, broadcasting plays or readings recorded by the Lymington Players. The 500th edition of a regular weekly request show which started in 2004 for the HCC Lymington Solent Mead care home was recorded on 31st Dec

2016 – After many years of broadcasting the daily request show from 8.00 – 10.00 pm it was brought forward one hour on 4th April 2016 to allow more patients to hear their requests while still awake. It now starts at 7.00 pm and finishes at 9.00 pm.

NFHR joined forces with New Milton Talking Newspaper to broadcast every Saturday morning their weekly recording of news taken from the local newspapers.

In October we were honoured to welcome Dame Esther Rantzen to our studio to record a programme of informal conversation and music with local celebrity 94 year old Bob Lowe. This was to thank us for promoting Silverline for 2 years since its inception.

2017 - In June we stopped broadcasting popular shows from BBC Radio Solent and Radio 4 which had occupied about 7 hours of our programming each day since we started 24 hour broadcasting in 2011. For the first time in the history of the station most of our daily output was produced in our own studios in the hospital. A studio open day and 14 hours of continuous live broadcasting was held to launch the new programming.

December saw the tenth anniversary of regular request shows for Colten's Woodpeckers care home at Brockenhurst. We also held our fifth annual "Jingles All The Way" Christmas open day with continuous daytime live broadcasting at the start of our Christmas programming.

Tony Clark
December 2017