**Friday 21 February 2025**

**Makeover for the Shirley Rose room at Williton Hospital**

Williton Hospital has seen many changes since it was built more than 35 years ago, the most recent being the refurbishment and renaming of the former chapel room just off the main entrance.

The chapel was originally dedicated by the Reverend George Carey, who at the time in 1989 was the Bishop of Bath and Wells, and later served as the Archbishop of Canterbury.

The room had a lectern, an oak altar with embroidered cloth, and was set up to be a place of worship and religious sanctuary.

Over the years though it was used much less and became an area where anything and everything tended to be stored.

Sarah Pearse, one of the ward clerks at Williton Hospital, which is run by Somerset NHS Foundation Trust, explained: “In recent years, the old chapel room hasn’t been used for its intended purpose much, as the needs of our patients have changed.

“We realised that we needed this room to be a sanctuary for everyone and to encompass all faiths, beliefs and values, so we approached our League of Friends, who agreed with our refurbishment proposal and kindly chose to fund the project.

“We wanted to reuse and repurpose as much of the original features of the chapel as sympathetically as possible, and local carpenter Martyn Lintern magically turned the oak altar into a cupboard and coffee table, and the lectern into a plant stand.

“And our friends at Exmoor Blinds repurposed the altar cloth into Roman blinds, with the material left over used to make cushions!

“A former patient whose rehabilitation goal was to get back to his passion of photography following a stroke, donated prints of local wildlife and landscapes, and they were framed beautifully by the team at Minehead-based Friday Print.”

Then it was time for colleagues and volunteers to come together for the room’s grand opening… but that wouldn’t be possible without a name…

“We asked the League of Friends to decide on a new name for the room as they had so kindly donated money for the refurbishment,” Sarah continues.

“They chose “The Shirley Rose Room” in memory of Shirley Dee, who was involved with the League of Friends for over 35 years, back in the days of the old hospital.

“Shirley fiercely supported Williton Hospital, and was involved in fundraising, coordinating volunteers, organising activities and much more!

“She ultimately became chair of the League of Friends, and only stepped down from the post in 2018 when she was 86! Shirley died at the hospital, and colleagues have said it was a privilege to care for her in her final days.”

Christine Bye, lead volunteer at Williton Hospital, added that Shirley played an enormous part in the hospital, and everyone knew and loved her.

“Shirley actually recruited me as a volunteer in 2000,” she said. “She was really good at getting people on board and you couldn’t say no to Shirley – she was one of those people!

“From organising all the church activities, such as Easter and Christmas services, to running a chair exercise class as part of her work with Age UK, Shirley truly did it all with such great energy.

“At around this time, our ward sister Sharon Stone felt we needed to bring the old chapel room back into use as a multifaith space, where colleagues, patients and family members could just go and sit if they wanted to.

“Sharon offered the League of Friends the opportunity to name the room, and they chose the name ‘Shirley Rose’ because there’s actually a rose flower called the “Shirley Rose” – we thought how lovely that would be in Shirley Dee’s memory!”

Marilyn Hill, chair of the Williton Hospital League of Friends, added: “We are so proud of the room, and particularly the way that the altar and altar cloth have been renovated to be put to good use. It has a lovely calm atmosphere.

“We would have liked to call it ‘Shirley’s room’, as she was such a great asset to the hospital, but Shirley was not one for fame or acclaim for anything she did… any awards and tributes were tucked away in a drawer… so we were pleased to come up with the Shirley Rose Room.

“On a more personal level, Shirley and her husband Don used to pick up my mum and take her to church on Sundays. They passed my mum’s place on their way, and said if you’re sitting on your wall we’ll give you a lift… and they did for many years.

“Shirley, who was going to give it all up at 80, but didn’t, just quietly got on with her good work, which involved inspiring, motivating and including her hospital volunteers and the League of Friends for over a quarter of a century. We all have so many memories of a truly remarkable woman.”

The Shirley Rose Room is now a sanctuary for all to come and use however they need – everyone is welcome!

**Ends**

### Attached photo:

Members of the Williton Hospital League of Friends.

### For further information, please contact:

Paul Hopkins, External Communications Lead at Somerset NHS Foundation Trust: paul.hopkins@somersetft.nhs.uk or 01823 344436 or 07717300326.