The NHS owes its very existence to the way people feel about their children. When it was first proposed, there was a view that the National Health Service would rob the existing Charity Hospitals - like Birmingham Children's Hospital as it then was - of their fiercely held independence. Opposition was real, and powerful. The greatest lever in overcoming it was the promise of free healthcare for children. When people realised that their children's health would be improved, the battle for hearts and minds was won.

And the promise was not a hollow one. The coming of the NHS in 1948 did see massive improvements in child health. It gave children's hospitals, like Birmingham's, the chance to develop from the local havens of excellence they already were into the unrivalled specialists in paediatric provision they have now become.

Over the past 60 years, this Hospital has undergone many changes, including a move back to its original site in Steelhouse Lane 10 years ago. It has become a national leader in some respects, internationally acclaimed. But at its heart lies Birmingham, in whose heart it commands a special place. As these pictures show, 'The Children's' was both a pioneer and a place for people to hope.

This commemorative souvenir booklet, issued to all Hospital staff, ends as it should: with a look into the future. Because that future is grounded in the proud past, which is as much a cause for celebration as it is a reassurance of who we are.
Politically incorrect?
A patient makes their point to Princess Margaretha of Sweden, visiting the Hospital in December 1967. Many dignitaries and VIPs have graced Birmingham Children’s Hospital throughout its history, including several monarchs.

The move to a purpose-built site at Ladywood in 1914 saw the Children’s Hospital start its NHS history in a building still fondly remembered by many (now an entertainment complex, Broadway Plaza). The Hospital moved from here to Steelhouse Lane in 1998.

Pioneering Lab work.
Sheila was diagnosed with PKU, a then crippling inherited disease, in 1951 (right image). The labs at the Hospital pioneered her treatment with a special diet and she improved remarkably (left) – proving that diet alone could spare children from the disease. Sheila’s success is one of many that have marked the Hospital’s progress within the NHS.

Christmas on the wards, circa 1960.
Parents were only allowed on Wards for restricted times well into the 1970s, when ideas about including families in child healthcare started to gain acceptance. Today, access is completely open and actively supported.
Past NHS uniforms were on view, prompting memories for some of Ward shifts in more orthodox times. Several of the displays boasted ‘period’ instruments, some in wooden cases. The literature on display included pamphlets ‘for the public’, yellowed and leather-bound clinical texts showing just how much medicine has changed even in three generations, and many posters spanning the 60 years. A special visit of a 1960s ambulance, crammed full of original equipment, brought back many more memories.

Staff and visitors also heard presentations to mark the occasion. Kate Parkes, from Radiology, began these with an outline of how the technology was then and has developed since.

The displays were visited by many members of the public and patients as well as staff.

A time to celebrate

Staff see the past, hear the history and glimpse the future

In a series of talks, displays and presentations in July 2008, the very best of The Children’s Hospital from the past and the brightest hopes for the future were shown to staff and visitors to mark 60 Years of the NHS – and 10 years of the Hospital moving to Steelhouse Lane. The displays were impressive. They ranged from the Eye Department’s past equipment, complete with ‘hands-on’ appliances staff enjoyed trying, to Clinical Photography’s working demonstration of the latest 3D imaging and The League of Friends’ material showing their long association with the Hospital.

Members of the Play Department, demonstrating a well-known play technique! Several Departments mounted their own ‘mini-exhibitions’ to celebrate.

Pete Hassan, Estates Manager, looks at archive material from the West Midlands Ambulance Service.
Other presentations included Professor Jill Mann’s Grand Round, which gave a comprehensive picture of the first ever UK Children’s Cancer Study Group and setting up of the Cancer Registry. Professor Deirdre Kelly’s talk on ‘Saving Livers, Saving Lives’ delivered the vivid story of the Liver Unit and how this world-class service arose and grew. Linda Jenkinson’s presentation on the work of the Clinical Chemistry labs described the service’s history and achievements through to the present day (almost a million samples processed last year alone).

The overriding impression was one of pride and surprise. People loved seeing what other departments did and they were impressed with the breadth of skills that the Hospital boasts.

A special ‘1940s’ theme was used to give a party atmosphere, albeit with some poetic licence, with Glen Miller tracks, tea and cakes for staff.

The Liver Unit’s display, showing the typically comprehensive material on show.

This Bedford ambulance was once a familiar site at the Hospital. Retired West Midlands Ambulance Service driver Malcolm Tomlinson, in 1960s uniform, completes the picture.

The Eye Department’s display allowed people to experience ‘vision-bending’ goggles.
A purpose-built research centre (the Wellcome Clinical Research Facility) became operational this Summer; and work will soon begin on a new accommodation block for parents: all part of an ambitious £150 million redevelopment of the main hospital site on Steelhouse Lane.

The next 60 years hold at least as much promise. Much of this relying on public fundraising. This year (2008) saw the opening of the Burn, Neonatal Surgery and Education Centre, confirmation of the Hospital’s status as a major provider for burns treatment in children. In the next phase of development, the Renal Unit will be moved into that new building.

The Children’s Hospital has never been short of ideas or dreams. Its very foundation, almost 150 years ago, stemmed from a determination to give the children of Birmingham the very best in specialised care.

The new Teenage Cancer Trust (TCT) extension, to be built over the existing Emergency Department entrance with the support of the TCT, will greatly improve provision for teenage patients with cancer.

The new Burn, Neonatal Surgery and Education Centre. The ‘Kidney Kids’ Appeal aims to fund the move of the Renal Unit into the last unoccupied floor, where the 60 Year Exhibition was held, as the next phase of development.

The vision continues

A purpose-built research centre (the Wellcome Clinical Research Facility) became operational this Summer; and work will soon begin on a new accommodation block for parents: all of these part of an ambitious £150 million redevelopment of the main hospital site on Steelhouse Lane.

This major redevelopment will include a new Ambulatory Care Centre, a new Emergency Department and Oncology Centre, a new Education Centre, and a new main entrance. The aerial photo of the existing Steelhouse Lane site shows how these plans should be realised.
The plans extend to further redevelopment of the site, replacing the Dental Hospital, as part of the concept of a ‘Children’s Health Quarter’ for children and young people in the city centre for future generations. Birmingham now has the youngest population for a European city. Its diversity has always been its strength: from the ‘city of a thousand trades’ in the heyday of the Industrial Revolution, when the Hospital was founded, to the multi-ethnic population it now boasts. The Hospital draws on, celebrates, and contributes to that strength; and it will continue to grow with the NHS and the City in this, its third century.

This devoted play area for patients with the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) will give some of the Hospital’s most vulnerable patients the chance to play in a protected space. It utilises part of Matron’s Garden within the main Hospital grounds, which in the past would have been given over to patient exercise but which had fallen into disuse.

The current main Hospital site on Steelhouse Lane, labelled to show how planned redevelopment will mean sweeping changes in the way the different areas are used, and in the services they will offer.

Whatever the future of the NHS holds, Birmingham Children’s Hospital will continue to care for children and young people - and be remembered as the special place it is.
Staff, patients and visitors were invited to leave messages saying what the Hospital meant to them. These are some examples...