

Dame Cicely Saunders

Born 22 June 1918 in Barnet, Cicely went to Oxford University in 1939 but broke off her studies to enter the Nightingale Training School to become a Red Cross nurse. During her three year training she developed severe back trouble and though she qualified she was told to give up nursing.

She returned to university, completed her degree and then trained as hospital almoner in 1947. During these years she became a devout Christian with a vision to provide palliative care. This required her to successfully train as a doctor and, age 38 in 1956, she started her new career and began research into the control of pain in terminally ill patients. This led to her vision of a dedicated medical facility and Cicely began fundraising.



In 1963 she found a suitable site in the Beckenham half of Lawrie Park Road close to the border of Sydenham. But it was another four years before she had raised £500,000 to complete the building which was opened as St Christopher's Hospice by Princess Alexandra (Mrs Angus Ogilvie) in 1967. The opening ceremony was covered on the front page of the Beckenham Journal (as shown above). She received an OBE for her work in the same year. In 1980 she was created a Dame Commander of the British Empire.

She lived close to her place of work at 50 Lawrie Park Gardens. Cicely died in St Christopher's Hospice on 14 July 2005. In her obituary in The Guardian on 16 July it stated that "*Saunders claimed that after 11 years of thinking about the project, she had drawn up a comprehensive blueprint and sought finance after reading Psalm 37: 'Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass.'*" Dame Cicely Saunders did indeed put her faith into practice by founding the Hospice Movement.

During the March of the Women Concert in March 2013, Marie Vassilou sung **A Beautiful Morning** and **Alone with Thee** as a tribute to Dame Cicely. They are two of the 43 prayers which the Salvationist, Irene Carr, wrote during her 'retirement' from the Salvation Army, and which have been set to music by her son Gordon.