The Liverpool Daily Post had a double page spread entitled ‘Turning back the clock on Casualty’. It describes the drama Casualty 1906 and the location for the programme the former 1889 Liverpool Royal Infirmary, designed by Alfred Waterhouse, now reborn as the University of Liverpool`s Foresight Centre. Our very own Barbara Leech and Jean Wood were invited to give advice during the filming and their article which appears in the paper is reproduced here.

EXPERT HELP FROM NURSING VETERANS

The Liverpool Royal Infirmary Nurses League gave vital background information and advice to ensure the accuracy of Casualty 1906. The League`s former president, Jean Woods, 75, of Hoylake, started at the hospital in 1949, aged 19, the first of her family to enter nursing. She became senior nursing officer (matron) at Liverpool`s Northern Hospital. Barbara Leech, of Greasby, is the League`s treasurer. Now in its 73rd year, the League has 500 members, aged from 60 to 97, and all worked at the original Royal. Jean says: "Life was very different when I joined the Royal. Matrons like Mary Jones ruled with rods of iron. You would close a ward for a whole week annually as a matter of routine to wash it down, even the light-fittings. "Many people left a lot of money to voluntary-aided hospitals until they became part of the NHS. These hospitals were allowed to keep these endowment funds, so were initially well off. "I was given a training book of 1934 about all the things the nurses were taught. Several pages are devoted to keeping yourself clean, with finally a quotation from Florence Nightingale saying `nurses should be clean to the point of exquisiteness`." Some of the practices Jean was familiar with from her early working years have disappeared, so she provided invaluable help to the director. "The actors didn`t know how to apply chloroform as an anaesthetic. This was administered through a facemask of gauze, but the eyes must be protected. "When filming, I realised the nurse giving the chloroform should have stood at the head of the table not the side. This was to hold the mask in position and the jaw up, so the tongue couldn't drop. "There was a scene where a patient had tried to commit suicide, with very realistic blood everywhere. It`s a good thing I`m not squeamish. "There were no such things as target dates for patient discharge. Length of stay, say for an appendectomy, would be 10 days. We got to know our patients very well, and you still remember the ones who gave us a bit of heartache. "We were always taught that the stitches stayed in for seven days. Sometimes, if it was an abominable wound and looked porky, deep stitches stayed in 10 days as secondary infection would occur on the 10th day, so patients were never discharged before then. "The Royal`s lovely chapel was used so realistically by the television people as a Casualty. The glazed walls` shininess dimmed down with dry ice. "When we still had the great Liverpool smogs up until the 1957 Clean Air Act, if the windows were open you couldn't see from one end of the ward to the other. "One man with TB was kept outside on Ward 8`s balcony for two years. We nursed him and, in winter, he was wrapped in tarpaulins, but he fully recovered."

Barbara recalls: "You were frightened of the ward sisters when I started. Staff like Sister Egerton had been in the Army and used to do inspections. Woe betide you if she found anything not to her liking. "There was not the disposability of items you get now. You never got used to cleaning the sputum cups. Nobody wants to go back to those days, but there was an incredible dedication, efficiency and precision. "There was a chapel service every night and you avoided going past as you`d get dragged in, the last thing you wanted at 8.30pm after a 12-hour shift. "There was a great Welsh influence, as the hospital served North Wales and this was reflected in staff and patients. We always had at least six John Joneses as patients, and three girls in my set failed their exams as English was not their first language. The Royal Liverpool was the first hospital outside London to have proper training for nurses and introduce district nurses in 1862 after the philanthropist William Rathbone contacted Florence Nightingale. "She preferred the long Nightingale wards, but we loved the round wards because you could see everyone and reach them easily. "The only time you sat down was when you fed patients. "Today's problems of patients not eating never occurred because the ward was closed and the ward sisters checked every person`s plates. "The hospital reflected the social history of the city, and Liverpool has a lot to be proud of with all the pioneering work and medical breakthroughs that were done here." The programme is provisionally scheduled to be shown at the end of November. Below is a picture of Barbara and Jean reproduced from the paper.

