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Media Release

Mary Berry is the cherry on the cake at grand opening

Queen of cakes, **Mary Berry** took time out of her busy schedule to officially open the brand new Friends Coffee Shop and the Combe Ward Garden at the Royal United Hospital.

On Saturday 11 October, the Great British Bake Off judge and local celebrity was given a tour of the newly built coffee shop and garden before cutting the ribbon to declare them officially open. The Coffee Shop has been funded by hospital charity, Friends of the RUH, and made possible due to the generous donations and fundraising efforts of the public. Mary Berry has her own personal connection to the charity – her mother was founding Chairman when it was established in 1957.

Mary Berry spoke about her mother's contribution to the Friends of the RUH and her lifelong interest in the affairs of the hospital – attending AGMs until the age of 105. Mary was pleased to see the good work of the Friends of the RUH continuing during a tour of the volunteer-run shop – which, in Mary's opinion had "just everything you need" during a hospital stay – and the brand new coffee shop, even pausing to comment on the "lovely" cakes on display. Finally, Mary cut the ribbon and wished the venture well, saying: "I wish the coffee shop a long and happy future"

The new café is a beautifully modern new home for the volunteer-run Friends Coffee Shop to operate from – providing an essential social hub for patients, visitors and staff. The building, designed by Edwin Hill of O'Leary Goss Architects, features a balcony which wraps around the exterior of the coffee shop, providing outside seating. The Combe Ward sensory landscape garden project was made possible by a government grant, and has been sensitively designed by Alex Fraser from Alex Fraser Landscape Architects. The garden is a quiet and peaceful space for patients and their families to retreat to and can be directly accessed by patients from the adjoining Combe Ward. The ward received recognition in a speech by Prime Minister David Cameron earlier this year for being a great example of a truly dementia-friendly ward.

Barbara Webber, Chair of the Friends of the RUH said:

"We are so pleased Mary Berry was able to visit us and declare open the new coffee shop and garden. It must be so satisfying for her to see how far we have come as a charity – building upon the fantastic work begun by her own mother in the 50's.

"For the past 60 years, the Friends Coffee Shop has been an essential meeting point for patients and for visitors. Momentous and sometimes upsetting news gets delivered in hospitals every day. We believe in providing a welcoming and pleasant space for patients and their families to retreat to for privacy, or simply for a bright moment in a difficult day. We have received letters over the years saying that the friendly smile they received from the volunteers in our café made all the difference at a difficult time."

As well as running the Friends Coffee Shop, the Friends of the RUH have a strong presence in the hospital; the hospital shop is run by volunteers, and volunteers welcome patients at the front desk, act as guides around the hospital, and offer a trolley 'shop service' selling essential supplies and snacks on the wards.

Volunteers make a real difference to the hospital community. If you or someone you know would be interested in giving up some of their time as a volunteer, contact the Friends of the RUH on 01225 824046 or visit www.friendsoftheruh.org.uk for more information.

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