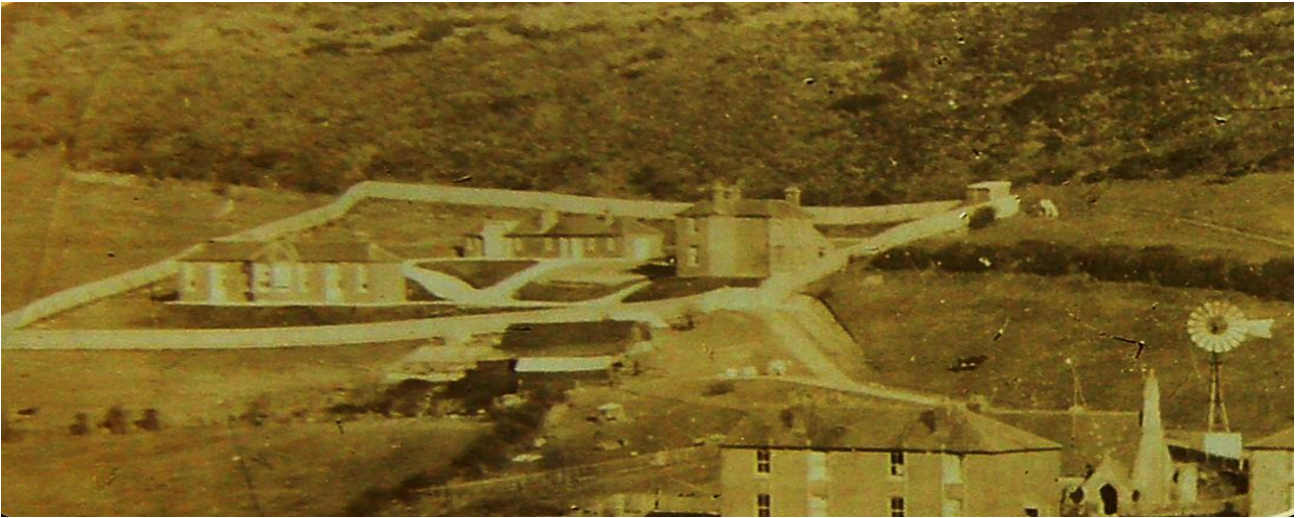




Ventnor & the Undercliff Isolation Hospital



Discussions concerning a proposed Isolation Hospital for Ventnor were started in 1892. For the next six years, public meetings were held to decide where the best place would be to build it. There were understandable worries about where the hospital would be sited as it would be exclusively for patients with infectious and exotic diseases who needed to be kept apart from other patients, and, of course, any members of the public.

A site was finally chosen at the top of Lowtherville Road and in November 1902 tenders were invited to build the new hospital. Two acres of land were leased for 999 years from the Lowther estate and the buildings were opened in 1904, Mr & Mrs Cameron the only permanent staff, living in a detached house adjacent to the hospital buildings. Residents were still very concerned that St Margaret's Church & Infants School (just to the left of the windmill) were dangerously close to the hospital boundary, as were some of the houses in Lowtherville Road. But they were re-assured by Dr. Whitehead that 40 feet would be the extreme limit at which infected patients could affect others. The other nearest buildings were those of Brooklands Farm just outside the southern wall.

The hospital site comprised four wards, a nurses' room, two bathrooms (with earth closets), an administration block with kitchen, a multi-purpose room, a mortuary (with wash-house), an ambulance shed and stable (for the horse), a laundry and living quarters for any staff.

Mr Cameron was the caretaker and his wife was the nurse. They were on a joint salary of 20/- a week with an additional 5/- for payment of assistants when required. Their tenure lasted only a year, when they were replaced by a Mr & Mrs Kemp. Mr Kemp left in 1915 to join the army, but the hospital carried on in his absence. Mrs Kemp is seen in the adjacent photograph standing on the far right.



A telephone was installed in 1919 and, presumably, because not many patients survived, the hospital was said to have a direct line to the Cemetery! As late as 1939, a horse-drawn ambulance was still in use - the last one on the Island (and possibly the whole of the Country).

When the hospital was first built, a well was sunk on site and a plentiful supply of pure water was found at a depth of over 200 feet. This was used until mains water was available in the area. However, due to the height of the Hospital above the surrounding land, a pump was needed to maintain enough pressure for its supply. Powered initially by a windmill, this was eventually replaced by an electrical pump housed in a small shed at the side of the road leading up to the hospital.

Inevitably, by the very nature of infectious diseases, admissions were spasmodic and the hospital closed in 1942. Most of the buildings are still standing (in one form or another) and have been used, at various times, to accommodate a cosmetics factory, a doll factory, a council depot and an upholstery business. When it was a doll factory, dozens of the local women were employed as outworkers, painting and dressing 'scotty dolls'. These outworkers were grateful for the chance to earn some extra cash, especially at Christmas.

Ventnor & District Local History Society: Colin Beavis (Note: an earlier piece on the Isolation Hospital appeared in the *Chronicle* for 9th February 2017, written by Lesley Telford, with a focus on scarlet fever. The main picture (above) is entirely new and comes from Colin's personal collection).