



The Royal National Hospital: a patient's story – part one

Among the Heritage Centre's archives is an eleven-page account of a 20-year old young woman's five-month stay at the Hospital as a TB patient. She came from Beckenham in Kent and had been transferred from Guy's Hospital in London where she had already spent many months being nursed on an ordinary medical ward. Her name is June Farnworth and she arrived at the Ventnor sanatorium, located at Steephill, on the 10th February 1949. It was very much later in life that she chose to commit her memories to paper and present them to the Heritage Centre.



June was brought all the way from Guy's by ambulance and she had not put a foot out of bed for ages, so she was plainly quite ill. Once the ambulance men had departed, there seemed to be no sign of anyone on the staff coming to admit her. Instead, she was placed straight into a twin-bedded room with another young woman, Jean Smith, who was also 20 years old. Jean, who seemed to have been a longstanding patient, knew all the hospital routines and was soon instructing June about them. She quickly clambered

from her own bed and into a dressing gown and began unpacking June's case of belongings. What followed was a real eye-opener for June. Patients were not allowed handkerchiefs, so June's supply would have to be sent home. Instead, they were required to use paper ones which were subsequently burnt. Any books had to be incinerated once read and Jean suggested that the paperbacks were kept and the hardbacks sent home. The same applied to all magazines. June had brought a collection of pictures with her, but the only items that could be kept were ones that could be wiped over daily with a damp disinfectant cloth. By this time, June's spirits were sinking, for she had had all these things on her ward at Guy's. She was also puzzled by there being so few staff around and, by the time of 'Lights out' at 9.30 pm, she longed to be back in London.

June's room was B13, on the first floor of one of the women's blocks (above). A corridor ran the length of the blocks on the inside and a balcony ran the length on the outside. All the patients' rooms had French windows that were left open day and night whatever the weather. June did not recall there being any form of heating, but there were, in fact, coal-fired boilers that heated pipes running through the corridors. The rooms were very sparsely furnished, all items being white-painted for easy disinfecting. There were just bare boards on the floor and each morning one of the orderlies would come round with some kind of disinfectant bran that was scattered across the floor and then swept up. Another orderly would then come with a bowl of disinfected water and proceed to wipe everything in sight: bedsteads, furniture, locker etc. June remarked how she soon became ever more conscious than before that she was a TB patient.

Ventnor & District Local History Society: Michael Freeman, the story to be continued next week



Ventnor & District Local History Society is a registered charity, working to preserve and record the history of our area and make it available to the public in the Ventnor Heritage Centre.

The Society and Heritage Centre are run and managed by volunteers.

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