

Dr George Martin lived through the Ventnor building boom which followed the publication of James Clark's book on climate and the cure of disease, and commented in his own book that "in bad weather its streets were, from the constant carting of stones for the purposes of building, impassable to foot passengers and totally so to carriages. I myself measured a rut in Victoria Street a foot and a half deep! In short the streets of Ventnor and mud were synonymous".

An Act of Parliament in 1844 established a Local Board of Commissioners for Ventnor which, Martin comments, "removed the mud, improved the streets, laid foot pavements and constructed a large and efficient sewer throughout the narrow streets".

From 1836 Martin lived at Belgrave House in Belgrave Road with his father and brother who was also a doctor. His wife, Elizabeth Isabella, gave large parties at great expense for the fashionable invalids who had come to Ventnor. Martin was assisted in his practice by Dr John Whitehead who was a surgeon at the Royal National Hospital as well as being Medical Attendant at the London City Mission in Mitchell Avenue.

Whitehead published his own book on the climate of the Undercliff "as deduced from forty years' consecutive meteorological observations" using Martin's records. "Snow during the 40 years was the marked exception, not the rule: and during the hardest winters not only the thermometer, but also the perfect preservation of the shrubs and evergreens, bore testimony to the comparative mildness of the atmosphere." A Public Health Act was passed in 1848 but it was not until 1880 when a government inspector came to Ventnor and reported on its defects: "The main drainage was thoroughly examined, defects permanently remedied, and where necessary a new sewer laid down...compulsory action being taken to compel proper communication with the main sewers. Existing wells were also examined and the water obtained from them forwarded for analysis and, where suspicious, the wells were closed." Dr. Whitehead also published a history of the Undercliff in 1911.

Mark Norman, the Ventnor diarist, said of Martin in his memoirs: "He was a little man, dark and apparently about 40. He was thin and spare and a nervous debility prevented him from walking due to a partial paralysis of his legs. He was of no great intellect but gifted with industry and perseverance." This was possibly a jaundiced view because Mark Norman blamed Ventnor doctors for the death of his three small children from scarlet fever.

When Martin died in 1867, Whitehead moved into Belgrave House and took over the practice there. In 1873 he married George Martin's daughter Sophia.



Belgrave House has now gone - in the 1930s it became The Belgrave Hotel, which is a bit surprising as the Royal Hotel was next door, and the site now houses the Belgrave Court flats.

Richard Downing, [Ventnor & District Local History Society](http://www.ventnorhistory.org.uk) drawing on sources from our archives, in particular: James Clark, *The influence of climate in the prevention and cure of chronic diseases* (1830); George A Martin, *The Undercliff of the Isle of Wight: its climate, history and natural productions* (1849); Alan Champion, *Ventnor doctors* (1996); John L Whitehead, *The climate of the Undercliff* (1881); John L Whitehead, *The Undercliff of the Isle of Wight: past and present* (1911).