

Glencoe Hospital, Glencoe



Glencoe Hospital 2009

Glencoe House, situated on the edge of Glencoe village, was built in 1895 by architect R Rowland Anderson as a family home for Lord Strathconaⁱ and is architecturally listed both internally and externally. In early 1940, during World War 2, it was acquired as a convalescent hospital for military personnel and conversion to a hospital was completed by the end of the year. The first matron, Miss B Anderson, was in post from November 1940 and the hospital was commissioned on 8th February 1941 with 40 beds although this was soon reduced to 38. On 24th May, the first patients were transferred from Gleneagles Hotel which had also

ⁱ Lord Strathcona (Donald Alexander Smith) (1820-1914) was born in Forres. He became a clerk in Hudson's Bay Company, Canada, eventually becoming its governor. A founder of the Canadian Pacific Railway, he drove the last spike at Craigellachie in 1885 completing Canada's first transcontinental railway. From 1896 until his death, he was High Commissioner for Canada in London. He became a peer in 1897. His many endowments include £8,238 to the Leancoil Hospital in Forres (1892), named after his mother's birthplace. He acquired Glencoe estate in 1894.

been taken over as a hospital. By 1942 there was a Ladies Committee who raised additional funds for patients.¹

After the War, it continued as a hospital, when Argyll and Bute County Council purchased it in October 1949 from Frances Margaret Palmer Kitsonⁱⁱ for £3,000. At the time, there were no maternity facilities in Oban and the planned maternity facility at the Belford Hospital, Fort William was not operational.ⁱⁱⁱ Therefore, in 1950,^{iv} despite its rather inconvenient location, it became the 16 bed maternity hospital for North Argyll, including Oban.² Maternity facilities were scarce in this area. There were no nursing homes registered in Argyll and, due to the dispersed nature of the population, no ante and post-natal clinics until after 1957. All such work was carried out by district nurses.³

Glencoe's medical superintendent was Dr Ashworth with local GP Dr WD Mackenzie as part time anaesthetist. In 1953, there were 134 confinements in the hospital. On average, only six or seven beds were occupied and about 20% of cases came from the Fort William area. It was staffed by six nurses and seven domestic staff and it was expensive to run, its unit costs being 10% above the national average. A letter of complaint to the Department of Health at the time, unsigned and written in block letters, described it as 'extremely outlandish and overstaffed' which may have been a common local perception and, indeed, the location was rather remote.⁴ From late 1955, Gleneuchar House in Oban became the area's main maternity hospital with 10 beds and the maternity facility at Glencoe then closed. At that point the matron was Miss HC Guild who continued in post until at least 1970.⁵

After World War 2, there was growing demand for geriatric facilities and, in 1953, the Oban Health Board had considered creating a geriatric facility at Glencoe Hospital either by giving over six - eight beds in the

ⁱ It was later noted that it had been gifted to Argyll County Council.

ⁱⁱ Grand daughter of Lord Strathcona.

ⁱⁱⁱ Argyll then stretched as far as Kinlochleven. Local authorities continued to manage maternity services after the NHS started. Even if the Belford maternity had been operational, North Argyll would still have required maternity facilities.

^{iv} The earliest press birth announcement we have found was in September 1949.

hospital (an idea rejected as impractical) or by converting the redundant electricity plant house and garages (the hospital was connected to the national grid in 1953) and using funds from the sale of the Ballachulish Hospital. However, this plan found little favour with the regional health board and was abandoned.⁶

When the maternity unit closed, the 16 beds were converted to medical use from around November 1955.⁷ By then, local people mainly attended the Belford for surgical treatment and planning for the use of Glencoe was in consultation with the Northern Regional Health Board. Both authorities wanted some beds for surgical convalescentⁱ and they proposed that only six beds be used for local geriatric patients. However, the closure of Ballachulish Hospital put accommodation for local geriatric patients under severe pressure and, by 1960, Glencoe had 10 geriatric and four medical beds plus two reserved for Glencoe patients.ⁱⁱ By 1970, it was classified as a geriatric hospital although it also dealt with emergency cases such as accidents. Given the close links with the Belford there were suggestions that it be transferred to the Northern Region but the local health board resisted this until 1974 when it became part of Highland Health Board.

In 1958, it was decided to sell the detached market garden which was considered uneconomic to operate.⁸ In the early 1960s, there were 17 beds. Staff now consisted of matron, three sisters, three nurses, four nursing auxiliaries, cook, kitchen maid, four maids and handyman. Discussions on increasing bed numbers had continued throughout the late 1950s and, by 1961, there were definite plans for reorganisation. In 1963, a lift was installed and there were extensive renovations which included demolishing two wings. It appears that the hospital capacity then increasedⁱⁱⁱ to 28 beds.⁹

ⁱ By then the Belford was under considerable pressure and patients were often discharged early to convalesce at home.

ⁱⁱ An advertisement for a matron in January 1956 says capacity is 16 beds (Oban Times 21 January 1956).

ⁱⁱⁱ It was listed as having 30 beds in the Birsay Report of 1967.

There were ongoing concerns over the high cost of running the hospital mainly due to its heating costs, building size and isolated location and the need for alternative accommodation was always on the agenda. By 1976, it was planned to close the hospital once the new 30 bed geriatric facility at Belhaven, Fort William was constructed. At the time, Glencoe required an estimated £150,000 upgrade in fire safety and re-wiring while the cost of the new unit at Fort William was £350,000. The Health Board and Scottish Office had calculated that only 30 geriatric beds were required in the area so that the new unit at Fort William could fully replace Glencoe. However, local people did not agree and there was much local concern when it became clear that, due to insufficient accommodation, elderly patients would have to travel to Inverness to be assessed. In 1978, after much discussion, the Secretary of State agreed that the area needed two geriatric facilities and that upgrading at Glencoe should proceed.¹⁰

The hospital was again reprieved after being ear-marked for closure in the 1980s and, by 2006, it was a Care of the Elderly facility with 12 beds, mostly long term, including a respite bed. Some of the patients had been resident in Glencoe for several years and considered it to be their home. It also housed a Social Work run Day Care facility and a Lunch Club and was a mainly GP led service.¹¹

In 2008, it was agreed to close Glencoe Hospital and transfer in-patient services to Abbeyfield at Ballachulish. Abbeyfield would provide a range of day, residential and nursing services and increase the bed capacity at Ballachulish from 18 to 24. Due to a flood at Abbeyfield, there was a delay but Glencoe Hospital finally closed on 9th June 2009.



Glencoe Hospital Entrance Hall 2009

Matrons

1940-?	Miss B Anderson.
?-1952	Miss Louden.¹²
?- 1955-6	Miss Lumsden.¹³
1956-1970-?	Miss HC Guild.¹⁴

References

¹ Oban Times 12 December 1942

² Oban Times 17 September 1949

³ CA/3/44 Argyll Archives

⁴ NHS5/6/56 Argyll Archives: Glencoe Maternity Hosp. File NRS: Northern Region Health Board General Purposes Committee 18 January 1951

⁵ CA/3/44 Argyll Archives

⁶ NHS5/6/56 Argyll Archives

⁷ Oban Times 24 September 1955

⁸ Oban Times 21 June 1958

⁹ NHS5/6/56 Argyll Archives: P&J 28 July 1975

¹⁰ Highland Health Board Minutes 20/2/76, 18/3/77: Highland Health Board Newsletter July 1978

¹¹ NHS website 3 October 2006

¹² Oban Times 31 May 1952

¹³ Oban Times 10 December 1955, 21 January 1956

¹⁴ Oban Times 7 April 1956, 12 March 1960