

## History of Highland Hospitals

### Bona Convalescent Home Bona 1894



By the 1880s, the Infirmary had, for some time, felt the need for a convalescent home. In 1882, the Northern Counties Convalescent Home was established in Nairn and the Infirmary established a fund to send Infirmary patients there although, by the late 1880s, a site closer to Inverness was being investigated. In 1892, the Infirmary ladies' committee<sup>i</sup> petitioned the Infirmary managers to erect a suitable house and, the following year, the managers committed £600 to its Convalescent Home Committee. By then, several other Scottish hospitals had founded convalescent homes, the first being in Edinburgh in 1867.<sup>1</sup>

In 1894, the Infirmary managers purchased Bona Lodge<sup>ii</sup> on Loch Ness (1904 OS map overleaf) for £975 and they reckoned they needed to raise

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<sup>i</sup> Most voluntary hospitals established such committees which looked to the comfort of patients including visiting, linen supplies and fund raising.

<sup>ii</sup> It consists of 2 semi-detached houses built in 1880 for MacDonald, Painter, Bridge Street, Inverness who lived in one half and let out the other (Mr JFM MacLeod).

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£1,500 in total. Miss Keir, senior nurse in the Infirmary, was appointed matron along with a maid and part time gardener.<sup>1</sup> A new management committee normally chaired by the Provost began weekly meetings. After some alterations which are likely to have included connecting doors in the front and upper hall and in the kitchens in the rear wing, the Home opened on 29<sup>th</sup> November 1894 with the opening ceremony in early December.<sup>2</sup> Altogether, the Home had 12 main rooms and there was also a lean-to along the rear of the house which acted as the laundry.<sup>3</sup>



The Committee controlled applications to the Home, resisting the attempt by Infirmary medical attendants to refer patients directly. Patients were mainly from the Infirmary and there was also a small number of paupers whose weekly fee of 12/-, the same as for other patients, was charged to the Parochial Board. Patients had to make their own way there, by boat to the pier at Aldourie (lower centre of map above) and then on foot to the Home (circled on map above). In 1903, after a patient had fainted en-route it was agreed that they would not be expected to set out in poor weather and would be met at the pier by someone from the Home.

Infirmary medical staff attended in two month blocks on rotation and the house rules were the same as that of the Infirmary. In 1895, a Ladies Committee was formed and Mrs Baillie of Dochfour, Mrs Forbes of Culloden and Mrs Fraser-Tytler of nearby Aldourie became patronesses.

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<sup>1</sup> There was an additional nurse by 1911.

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The Home was funded separately from the Infirmary with separate accounting and fundraising. In 1896, the managers applied for and received £350 from the estate of the Earl of Moray.<sup>4</sup> In 1900, the Infirmary invested a legacy of £1,000 from Surgeon Major Dr Alex Grant and used the interest 'for the benefit of poor patients' which included assistance after they left the Home to 'tide over their first difficulties'. The investment was doubled the following year from the estate of his sister Miss Jessie Grant also to be used to assist poor patients discharged from the Home. The following year, Miss Grant bequeathed a further £500 for this purpose.

As with other public institutions, attempts were made to be self-sufficient. In March 1895, the paddock was ploughed up by the farmer at nearby Dares<sup>i</sup> Farm to grow potatoes. In August 1895, Mrs Fraser-Tytler of nearby Aldourie Castle donated money to erect a piggery with a pig to follow when the piggery was complete. The pig was ready for sale by October. A Mr Walker donated a poultry house which was built at the end of the stable. In 1902, upgrading to water and sewerage was completed but water still had to be carried from Loch Ness. In 1907, the Home acquired a new water supply from nearby Aldourie Estate which saved the staff considerable work.

**Annual patient numbers**

<b>Year</b>	<b>In-patients</b>		<b>Year</b>	<b>In-patients</b>
<b>1898</b>	119		<b>1902</b>	86
<b>1899</b>	105		<b>1903</b>	112
<b>1900</b>	114		<b>1904</b>	116
<b>1901</b>	85		<b>1905</b>	89

In March 1895, it appears the capacity of the Home was 4 males and 4 females but, from at least 1909, it had increased to 13 beds which is likely to have been an internal reorganisation since there is no evidence of an extension at this time. The table above shows the annual patient

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<sup>i</sup> Not to be confused with Dares which is further away.

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numbers which remained fairly steady. In the first 18 months there were around 100 patients and, from a range of monthly returns and census results, it seems that the Home had typically anything from 3 - 8 in-patients. At the 1911 census, there were 7 male and 4 female in-patients of which 5 were under 20 and 4 over 60 and all working class.<sup>5</sup>

In August 1914, the Home closed, partly due to the matron going on war service. In 1915, it opened for three months for nine patients but closed in December due to a staff shortage. In 1918, the Home was used for two months but, by then, a more 'elevated and accessible' building<sup>i</sup> was desired and it was decided to sell the property. Bona Lodge reverted to residential becoming, once more, two semi-detached houses which remain to this day largely unchanged.

During this time, Nairn Convalescent Home was used once more and, by 1917, had allocated four beds to the Infirmary and, in 1918, received 19 patients from there. By 1921, the managers reckoned that they had £4,000 to spend and were looking for another property. They considered a proposal to rent or acquire all, or part, of the Nairn Convalescent Home but this did not happen. Despite periodic calls for the development of convalescent facilities to relieve the pressure on hospital beds, there seems to have been no subsequent development and the Infirmary continued to use the Nairn Convalescent Home<sup>ii</sup> until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>6</sup>

### Matrons

<b>1894 - 1900</b>	Miss Keir	
<b>1900 - 1902</b>	Miss Munro <sup>7</sup>	
<b>1902 - 1908</b>	Elizabeth Massie	Became matron of Morningfield Hospital Aberdeen. <sup>8</sup>
<b>1908 - 1914</b>	CM MacFadyen	

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<sup>i</sup> Fresh air and an open aspect were thought beneficial to recovery.

<sup>ii</sup> Despite the fact that Nairn Convalescent Home was not included within the NHS.

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## References

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- <sup>1</sup> Leslie and Leslie *The Hospitals of Nairn* 2012: Cronin J *Origins and development of Scottish convalescent homes, 1860-1939*. PhD thesis 2003 Glasgow
- <sup>2</sup> Scottish Highlander 29 November 1894: 6 December 1894
- <sup>3</sup> We are most grateful to Miss E Luke and Mr JFM Macleod for kindly allowing access to their homes to observe the original features of the Home.
- <sup>4</sup> Highland Times 9 May 1896
- <sup>5</sup> *Report on Hospital Services of Scotland* 1920 National Insurance Health Commission National Library of Scotland: Weekly reports from Matron of Convalescent Home 1909 Highland Archives
- <sup>6</sup> Leslie and Leslie 2012 *op.cit.*: Northern Counties Convalescent Home Minutes Nairn Museum
- <sup>7</sup> British Journal of Nursing 3 January 1903 p7
- <sup>8</sup> Strathspey Herald 30 April 1908