

## John Martin Hospital, Uig 1907



**John Martin Hospital c1920**

John Martin of Treaslane, a descendant of the Martins of Flodigary, was born in Kilmuir. After working as a teacher he went to Ceylon as a coffee planter<sup>1</sup> and had stopped before the collapse of the coffee crop there. He retired to Skye to live with his widowed sister, Mrs Matheson, and died, unmarried, on 21 March 1898.<sup>i</sup> He left £500 and the interest on his estate to his sister ‘during all the days of her natural life’ and stipulated that, after her death, £12,000 of this residue be used to build and equip a ‘hospital and medical officer’s house... and the balance retained ... and the interest thereof only expended’.

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<sup>i</sup> It is remembered locally that John Martin was in business with his brother in law Roderick Roy. Roderick wished to build a hospital in Staffin but died and John Martin who had agreed to match Roderick’s sum built the hospital at Uig instead.

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John Martin's Will specified four trustees – the Chairs of the Kilmuir Parochial and School Boards, Chair of the Stenscholl School Board and the Sheriff at Portree. However, Parochial Boards had been abolished in 1894 – replaced by Parish Boards - and the trustees thereafter were just the Sheriff and the minister of Snizort Parish Church.<sup>2</sup>

The Trustees were required to 'erect the hospital at Uig ... which I consider the most central position to suit the district'.<sup>3</sup> Mrs Matheson died in 1900. There was then a delay while a site was found. The Reverend MacRury was left on his own when his co-trustee, Sheriff Fraser, died and, when Sheriff Campbell replaced him in 1902, it was decided that the endowed sum was insufficient. The invested capital was allowed to grow and after the costs of building and equipment were met, the endowment left was around £10,150. This gave an income of around £350 per annum of which staff costs approximated £150, medicines £30, and the rest was food, fuel and other running costs.

The hospital was to be 'for the treatment of the sick poor, including crofters and others in similar circumstances, in the Isle of Skye ... including the treatment of outdoor patients and supplying them with medicine free of charge and also giving them medical advice' and preference given 'to the sick ... from the Parish of Kilmuir' ... being my native parish'. It was to be called 'the John Martin Hospital in memory of me ... and of my regard for the poor of my native parish.'<sup>4</sup> Infectious diseases were not to be admitted and admissions required the approval of a doctor or hospital committee. However, matron was able to admit any emergency case. Free medicine and advice could be given to poor out-patients.

The trustees invited hospital designs from architects and respondents included Macdonald, Rhind and Gall of Inverness and Mackenzie of Dingwall. They received a rather sharp repost from Ross and MacBeth, Inverness saying their terms of the specification were unfair to the

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<sup>i</sup> And also Trotternish as was stated at the opening ceremony.

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architect. The successful architect was James AH Mackenzie of Portree and the subsequent trades are shown below.<sup>5</sup>

Mason	Macfarlane & Macleod, Portree	Painter	Murdo Gilles, Kilmuir
Joiner	Mackenzie & Macleod, Portree	Plasterer	Hugh Sinclair, Tobermory
Plumber	William Anderson, Ft William		

The hospital had two three bed wards, consulting room, matron's room, two bedrooms and kitchen. The endowment conditions meant that there were insufficient funds left to build a mortuary and observation ward, the lack of which was seen as a difficulty by 1912 when the admission of a typhoid and a tetanus case forced patients to move out of a ward. Similarly, there were insufficient funds for a doctor's house and an early local appeal raised only £167.<sup>i</sup> The first medical officer, Dr Dewar, lived in Portree<sup>ii</sup> but, following his death in 1909, the newly appointed Dr Macdonald could not find a house locally. At one stage, he had to send his family away and live in lodgings because the house he was renting was a shooting lodge (Conon Lodge) and was required for a summer let.<sup>6</sup> In 1904, the lack of doctor's house was raised by the Parish Medical Officer who, following a local meeting, wrote to the Congested District Board<sup>iii</sup> also protesting that the site was too remote from the sick poor of Kilmuir and that the annual site rent was too high. The Board decided that the matter was outwith their jurisdiction. However, it was from the Board that the homeless doctor managed to rent accommodation in 1910.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> This was set up by hospital trustees Sheriff Campbell and Rev. MacRury to commemorate the King and Queen's visit to Uig on 1 September 1903. However, as can be seen, it was unsuccessful (Scotsman 20 Aug. 1903).

<sup>ii</sup> There was concern about the distance away but there were reassurance that the doctor was about to get a car which would cut journey time to about an hour.

<sup>iii</sup> The Congested District Board for the Highlands (1897 – 1911) was set up to assist crofters and relieve overcrowding. It could buy and sell land and property.

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The one acre site had been identified by 1902<sup>i</sup> and the hospital was under preparation by mid-1904<sup>8</sup> and included an iron fence which surrounded the site. The cost was £1314 including furnishings and fittings.<sup>9</sup> The hospital was opened on 27<sup>th</sup> March 1907 by trustee Sheriff Campbell in front of a large crowd.

It initially treated around 20 patients per annum. In the three years - 1909 to 1912 – there were 87 admissions which included 43 surgical, one death and one sent to ‘the Asylum’ (a psychiatric hospital).<sup>ii</sup> The average number in the hospital was four and they stayed an average of 38 days which seems slightly longer than average for a cottage hospital. Around 300 out-patients had received free treatment and medicine. The rules of admission seem fairly flexible being by letter from the patient’s doctor, minister, or friend or ‘if they call at the door they are admitted’. Patients came mainly from the local area but also from as far away as Kyleakin. Dr Macdonald noted that many could not be admitted due to insufficient accommodation or because it was judged that their condition would not be improved by hospital treatment. There seems to have been a full range of ailments but only a small number which could be ascribed to accident and no maternity. The ten major operations used chloroform and the minor operations used cocaine or eucaine.<sup>10</sup>

Similar to the neighbouring Gesto Hospital, colleagues assisted at operations and were paid a fee of two guineas. In 1912, Dr MacDonald received £60 per annum as medical officer and £60 as parish medical officer. He reckoned he could deal with all surgical procedures at the hospital describing its facilities as quite modern. In 1907, the hospital received from James Coats of Paisley a large medicine cabinet, a supply of medicines and a set of surgical instruments. In 1911, Mr Coates also donated a portable and collapsible white enamel operating table and an antiseptic stand.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> An application for a feu was reported in the Scotsman on 5th February 1903.

<sup>ii</sup> Presumably Craig Dunain Hospital in Inverness then called the Inverness District Lunatic Asylum (see Leslie & Leslie *The Hospitals of Inverness*).

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The first matron was Janet or Jessie Anderson. She belonged to Kingussie and, in 1914, had to resign due to ill health and return home. She was replaced but, in late 1916, there was again a vacancy and the trustees received a petition describing Nurse Anderson's devotion to duty and requested that the trustees try to secure her return. It was signed by over 30 local crofters. By this stage, Nurse Anderson's health was improving and a letter from her doctor Dr De Watteville<sup>i</sup> confirmed her fitness for duty. She therefore returned until August 1926 when she again had to give up for health reasons. Her successor Nurse M Tulloch arrived in 1927 and, in July 1936, started a six month course at a Maternity Hospital in Edinburgh. From the evidence, she was anticipating the need for the matron to have a maternity qualification when the new maternity wing opened in 1937 and was using the time when the hospital was closed for the building work. However the trustees wrote to her on 31 July 1936 terminating her contract. This seems to have come out of the blue as far as Miss Tulloch was concerned since she still had belongings in the hospital. The trustees subsequently appointed Nurse Mary Mackenzie as matron. She was well known to them being district nurse in Kilmuir.

The first medical officer, Dr Dewar, was also medical officer of health for Skye. Dr Macdonald, who replaced him in 1909, also became the local parish medical officer. By 1924, Dr Macdonald's health was not good and had deteriorated again by 1929 when Dr Ross, parish medical officer for Portree, acted as relief. Dr Macdonald died in November 1931 leaving a vacancy for a medical officer for the parish as well as the hospital. The Trustees, aware of the benefits to the area of having a combined post, attempted to get the local authority to coordinate the appointments but this could not be done and, in early 1932, the Trustees appointed Dr Ross. However, the local authority subsequently appointed Dr Lamont, then parish medical officer at Bracadale, to the parish post. Dr Ross generously withdrew his acceptance of the hospital

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<sup>i</sup> He was a local doctor and also ran the Grampian Sanatorium at Kingussie but there is no evidence that Nurse Anderson had any tubercular complaint.

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post in favour of Dr Lamont. A difficulty was that Dr Lamont had no major operating experience or, it appears, much obstetric experience at the time and such admissions to the hospital were limited. However, it was under Dr Lamont's guidance that, in the 1930s, the hospital became mainly maternity.

There were the usual hospital rules for maintaining discipline. Meal times had to be strictly adhered to - Breakfast 8.00am, Dinner 12 noon, Tea 4.00pm and Supper 7.30pm. Patients had to be in bed by 9.00pm when the lights were extinguished and all conversation had to cease. No more than two visitors could attend at a time for a maximum of 30 minutes on Tuesday and Friday afternoons. Matron Tulloch was warned at one point for apparently being too lenient in applying this rule. Outpatients were only seen on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Friday of each month from 11am until 2.00pm. Medicines were free only to the poor although, in 1912, Dr Macdonald noted that no charges were made to any out-patients for medicines.<sup>12</sup>

The hospital normally broke even, financially, or ran at a small loss and it seemed to rely entirely on its endowment for income. It seems to have closed each year as a matter of course to save money (which was when the matron went on leave) or when there were difficulties with the building or staffing. In 1918, the hospital was closed for at least three months in the spring due to shortage of provisions and again at the end of the year due to the cost of fuel and it seems to have often closed in winter. In 1924, it was closed because of the medical officer's illness. In October 1925, it closed for substantial refurbishment. By March 1926, it was fit for occupation although there was still damp. Subsequent problems with plaster work were not resolved until June of that year. Notes from the matron suggest that the annual closure was irregular since she seems frequently uncertain as to the dates of closure or reopening. In June 1939, it closed 'for holidays'.<sup>13</sup>

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A small two bed maternity annex was built in 1936.<sup>i</sup> The trustees had noted that ‘there is no hospital in this large area ... where such (maternity) cases can be taken’ and proceeded to mount a campaign for maternity services in Skye. They unsuccessfully pursued a grant from the Department of Health which felt there was insufficient local specialist obstetric expertise to justify giving one. The new wing was opened on 18th February 1937 by Mrs Inglis, wife of trustee Sheriff Inglis, and gained its registration as a maternity home the following month. The architects were J & W Wittet from Elgin.<sup>14</sup>

Having sacked the previous matron, the hospital required a replacement with experience in maternity and a second nurse. Gaelic speakers were preferred for both posts. As noted earlier, Nurse Mary MacKenzie was appointed matron but the second nurse post proved much more difficult to fill. Advertisements yielded no applicants and the trustees trawled major hospitals but only managed to get a series of short term appointments. Although the hospital had some endowed funds to build the new wing, a public appeal was made in June 1936 to gain additional funds and ensure that with the extra expense the maternity work could continue uninterrupted. There was a concert in Portree in 1936 to raise funds for the annex<sup>15</sup> and, by August, over £350 had been raised mainly from local subscribers but with a scattering from across the UK and at least one from Canada. In 1940, Sheriff Inglis made a national appeal for funds. He noted some details about the hospital. There were now two three-bed wards and a single bed maternity annex. He stated that it took an average of £297 to run the maternity ward and the average receipts had been £95 a deficit which was likely to increase as cases increased. Births in the first three years, 1937-40, had been 15, 15 and 28 and, in a letter to the Inverness Courier, he noted that ‘it is now the regular thing to go to the “John Martin” to have your baby.’<sup>16</sup> This was indeed a prophetic statement - by the 1940s the hospital was described as mainly

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<sup>i</sup> This is in accord with the recognition across Scotland to improve maternity services which resulted in the Maternity Act of 1937 (Scotsman 8 July 1936)

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maternity and only one non-maternity case was admitted after 1950 (table below).

### John Martin Hospital Births<sup>17</sup>

Year	Births	Year	Births
1951	99	1957	52
1952	78	1958	53
1953	83	1960	54
1954	75	1963	82
1955	62	1964	75
1956	58		

Apart from the maternity wing, there is little evidence of fund raising and relatively few legacies or major donations. Those below are all that have been discovered.

1937	Estate of Mr Donald Maclean, carpenter of Stormyhill <sup>18</sup>	25% of £6558 shared with Mackinnon Memorial Hospital, RNI Inverness, and Western Infirmary Glasgow.
1945	Estate of Mr Donald Mackinnon	Half of £4000 shared with the Mackinnon Memorial Hospital.

The Scottish Hospital Survey of 1946 described the hospital as mainly maternity with a few medical cases. It had seven beds in two well-lit three-bed wards and a single room, presumably the maternity annex, labour room and dispensary. It had a private electric plant and shared water supply and sewerage. At the hand over to the NHS in 1948 it had around £16,000 in funds.<sup>19</sup>

In 1948, alterations started to provide a quiet room and a new maid's bedroom. By then, nursing consisted of a matron and three nurses, one of whom was night nurse. Accommodation was difficult and one nurse had to sleep in an occupied ward and another in the converted surgery (Skye surgery was now carried out at the Gesto or Mackinnon Memorial Hospitals).<sup>20</sup> There were no domestic servants in 1948 and staffing



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difficulties may be the reason why the hospital closed for a time<sup>i</sup> in 1949.<sup>21</sup> In the post war period, nursing staffing was in difficulty generally and the new Skye Health Board received many complaints about pay and conditions from nurses in Broadford as well as in Uig. Nurses often worked long hours and, due to staff shortages, often completed the domestic work.<sup>ii</sup> By 1949, capacity had increased to 11 beds but reduced to nine from 1950 onwards.<sup>22</sup>

There was only one non-maternity case admitted after 1950 with an average of four in-patients, although numbers varied. In all the discussions on a Skye central hospital it seems to have been agreed that the John Martin would close once maternity cases were transferred to the new Portree Hospital. However, there was growing pressure on geriatric beds at the Gesto and, in May 1960, North Skye residents petitioned the health board for the hospital to continue or be used for geriatric and this campaign continued. The Highland Health Board refused, considering it unsuitable because of the steep access<sup>23</sup> and the hospital closed on 20<sup>th</sup> January 1965. Matron, Miss Mary Ross, and the staff were transferred to the new Portree hospital which, along with the Mackinnon Memorial, had maternity beds. The Uig building was damaged by fire after closure but sold to the Scottish Youth Hostel Association for £4,500 in January 1966 and became the Uig Youth Hostel with a large extension in front of the original building. It later became a restaurant.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> In 1949, a memo of December notes that Skye should be adequately supplied with maternity beds 'when Uig functions'

<sup>ii</sup> Domestic staff and nurses could often get better pay in other sectors.

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### Matrons

1907 - 14	<b>Janet Anderson</b> resigned due to ill health
1915	<b>Katie MacDonald &amp; Jeanie Lumsden</b> Short term contracts.
1916	<b>Nurse Paterson</b> from the Military Hospital at Cromarty.
1917 - 26	<b>Janet Anderson</b> re appointed. Resigns for health reasons.
1927 - 36	<b>Nurse Marie Tulloch</b>
1936	Nurse matron and nurse (the first assistant nurse) required both with Gaelic - £110pa and £80pa resp. <sup>25</sup>
1937- 1950	<b>Nurse M Mackenzie</b> <sup>26</sup>
1950	<b>Miss Crawford</b>
1950-53	<b>Miss Beaton</b>
1953 - ?	<b>Miss Margaret MacAskill</b> <sup>27</sup>
? - 1956 - ?	<b>Miss A McIvor</b> <sup>28</sup>
? - 1965	<b>Miss Mary Ross</b>

### Medical Officers

1907-09	<b>Dr John Dewar</b> (d 13 <sup>th</sup> Jan 1909) <sup>29</sup> also MOH for Skye
1909-31	<b>Dr Alexander (Alistair) Grant MacDonald</b> , Tobermory, graduated Edinburgh 1887. 12 years private practice in Fife. MD in Canada while 3 years in charge of Dawson City hospital. Died 1931. He was appointed jointly with Snizort Parish - £60 as parish MO and £50 as hospital MO. <sup>30</sup>
19?29-1944	<b>Dr Angus Lamont</b> , later Chair of NHS Inverness Division
1944-61	<b>Dr Allan MacDonald</b> (An Dotair Mor) also a surgeon operating at Broadford. Resigned due to ill health.
1961-64	<b>Dr Calum MacRae</b> arrived in 1957 to assist his uncle, Dr Allan MacDonald. He had a strong interest in obstetrics and continued at Portree.

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Former John Martin in 2008 showing the large extension and the steep access. The chimney of the original building is on the right.

## References

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- <sup>4</sup> *ibid*
- <sup>5</sup> Inverness Courier 2 April 1907
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- <sup>7</sup> Letter from Alex Murchison 29 Oct 1904 National Records of Scotland
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- <sup>9</sup> Abstract of Account of John Martin Highland Archive Centre
- <sup>10</sup> Medical Superintendent's report 1909 – 1911 *op. cit.*
- <sup>11</sup> Macdonald Dr AG Evidence to the Dewar Committee *op. cit.* p331: Northern Chronicle & General Advertiser 15 Mar 1911
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- <sup>14</sup> Scotsman 8<sup>th</sup> July 1936
- <sup>15</sup> Daily Record 20 Jun 1936

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