

Nairn and Northern Counties Convalescent Home Tradespark 1882



Nairn Convalescent Home

Courtesy of Nairn Museum

The Nairn and Northern Counties Convalescent Home was established in 1882.¹ Miss Annie Chambersⁱ formed a committee of eight people, of which she was secretary, and, in May 1883, they rented a cottage for four patients in Tradespark, Nairn. They were successful and moved to a bigger house, now called Rowan Cliff at 25 Tradespark Road.² In 1884, an appeal was launched for funds without much success - only raising £30. This had to be used to meet a deficit in running costs, prompting the Home to raise its prices in order to break even. In the first two years it treated 63 convalescing patients (33 in 1884) but there were also private boarders.³ Despite its lack of financial support, it had many well-wishers and the 1885 annual meeting was attended by 'a large and fashionable company of ladies and gentlemen' from the Inverness and Nairn area. The meeting confirmed the Home's ambition to serve the Northern Counties and noted that it was regarded as belonging as much to Inverness as to Nairn.⁴ This is possibly why the Northern Infirmary,

ⁱ Still secretary in 1885 but not formally involved from the late 1880s. She attended the 1893 opening but died in 1898 amid much praise for her initiative.

which already referred patients,ⁱ allocated a stall at its 1888 ‘Great Bazaar’ which raised the considerable sum of £1,032 of which the Home received £137.⁵ In return the Home allocated 25 free nominations to Northern Infirmary patients.⁶ In 1889, a bazaar in the Inverness Town Hall specifically for the Home was opened by Cameron of Lochiel and this raised about £850.⁷

Numbers in Home

Year	No in Home	Note
1905	56	⁸
1906	62	⁹
1921	49	¹⁰
1922	51	¹¹
1924	60	¹²
1927	80	¹³
1935	68	20 from Royal Northern Infirmary. ¹⁴

In 1887, the Home had rented a larger house in Tradespark but this was taken back by the landlord in 1891.¹⁵ The Home committee then decided to build their own house with a budget of £600, a decision precipitated by the expiry of their lease and the difficulty of finding a replacement, although they managed to temporarily rent 2 & 4 Charles Place, Nairnⁱⁱ in 1892.¹⁶ One acre of land at Tradespark was gifted by Mr Finlay MacGillivray, a local surveyor. The new single storey Home was built on it in 1892¹⁷ with architects Ross & Macbeth¹⁸ and, on 7th September 1893, it was opened by Lady Eleanor Brodie of Brodie. Dr Brodie Cruickshank, local doctor and medical officer to the Homeⁱⁱⁱ, presided in the absence of Mr Fraser of Brackla who was chair for many years.¹⁹

The Home had a day room, matron’s room, servant’s room, kitchen, bathroom, two four bed wards and a single private ward and this nine bed capacity continued into the 1930s.²⁰ The ‘objects’ of the Home were

ⁱ By 1889, the Northern Infirmary had established a separate fund to send convalescing patients to Nairn. It opened its own Home at Bona in 1894.

ⁱⁱ Charles Place is now part of Cumming Street. In 1891, No 2 had 6 rooms and No 4 had 3 rooms. (courtesy of Mr A Barron)

ⁱⁱⁱ He gave his services free as happened at most voluntary hospitals at this time

to ‘afford rest and repose, with ample nourishment, to invalids and debilitated persons’ whose circumstances prevent them regaining their health and strength otherwise’. Admission was only for convalescing patients. With a subscriber’s nomination (and a reference from their church minister) patients had 10 days free treatment or three weeks at three shillings (15p) per week and a similar arrangement continued at least until the 1920s. Patients without a nomination were charged 12 shillings (60p) per week.²¹ By 1917, the charge had risen to 15 shillings (75p) per week. From at least 1892, the Home closed from mid-November until mid-February but, by the early 1900s, it closed for four months until 1st April.ⁱⁱ Between 1882 and 1893 it had treated about 400 patients. The new Home, annually, treated 60-80 patients who stayed two - three weeks and this continued into the 1930s.

In 1897, the trustees were the Lord Lieutenant and the Convenor of the County of Nairn and the Provosts of Inverness and Nairn although it was later decided not to include the Nairn Provost. It had a long list of patrons including the Duke of Richmond & Gordon and the Earl of Moray and there was a Management Committee of 24 people including one from Elgin and 10 from Inverness. By then, there was also a House Committee of eight ladies. By the early 1900s, it seems that formal meetings were normally only held annually and usually attended by around seven people.²²

Legacies

Year	Amount	Note
1896	£300	Late Earl of Moray. ²³
1899	£100	Late Mrs Marianne Cameron of Clifton Lodge Inverness left £100. ²⁴
1917	£300	Late Mr John Innes, Newlands of Clune, Nairn. ²⁵
1922	£144	Garden fete in Whinnie Knowe Gardens. ²⁶
1931	£5000	Lady Seaforth

ⁱ Dr Cruikshank said in 1922 that it had been for the ‘working classes’ and that he had never had a complaint ‘with regard to food, beds and general treatment’.

ⁱⁱ The income was considered insufficient to stay open all year. Small hospitals such as the John Martin in Skye had similar cost saving arrangements.

In 1903, an extension was built at the rear of the building which contained a bath and required a specific outlet pipe to the nearby Alton Burn. In 1914, the Home was offered to the military for wartime use and, although it is not clear what the military response was, a subsequent request for the Home to be used to treat convalescing wounded soldiers was refused by the Committee on the grounds that the Home was too small. By 1917, the Northern Infirmary had closed its own convalescent home and the Home agreed to make four beds available to Infirmary patients. The Infirmary sent 19 patients in 1919. In 1921, there were further discussions with the Infirmary over either their acquiring or leasing the Home or forming a Nairn and Inverness joint venture but agreement on this could not be reached.²⁷ However, the Home continued to receive 20-30% of its patients from the Northern Infirmary. Staffing consisted of a matron and a servant and this continued for many years.

The 1920s saw significant change in personnel. In 1922, solicitor Alexander Storm resigned as secretary after 31 years in the post. In 1925, Dr Cruickshank, medical officer to the Home from its beginning, died.ⁱ In 1926, Miss Macgregor, the matron, died suddenly when there were five patients in the Home. These had to be sent home while the Home closed for a fortnight, and a temporary matron was employed for the rest of the year.

Financially, the Home ran in surplus at least until the late 1920s when the endowment had grown to well over £1,000. Fund raising was carried out but it does not seem to have been the urgent necessity often experienced in voluntary hospitals. In 1922, a fete at Whinnieknowe, Nairn, raised £144 but there are few records of specific fund raising events. However, like other voluntary health care charities, it received regular donations from events such as concerts, dances, whist drives, collections in church and from organisations such as the scouts. From the mid-1920s, it received gifts of produce. In the 1920s, the Nairn Comedy Club is regularly acknowledged as a benefactor and Inverness Town Council subscribed, underlining the value of the Home to Inverness patients.

ⁱ Dr Eric Wilson took over until 1947 and was followed by his partner Dr King.

Individual cash donations and small legacies were received as well as, occasionally, more substantial sums such as £1,000 received in 1917, £1,500 in 1931 from Andrew Morison's estateⁱ and, in 1936, £3,000 from the estate of Lady Seaforth.²⁸ Similar gifts continued throughout its entire history. These gifts allowed regular improvements and upgrades such as a telephone in 1926, a new kitchen range and hot water system in 1928, a new veranda or summer shelter in 1931 and a wireless set in 1933.

In 1927, the Home adopted a new constitution which established an AGM and transferred the trustees to the President, Vice President, Chair, Hon Secretary and Hon Treasurerⁱⁱ.²⁹ Instead of the 24 strong management committee there were now nine members elected by the AGM to serve alongside the office bearers.

In the 1940s, a report on the hospitals of Scotland described it as 'stone built with nine beds' and 'poorly equipped, too small and out of use for some years'.³⁰ Actually, it had only closed from 1939-45 when the matron was called up for war service and, from 1940, was used by Nairn County to house child wartime evacuees. A large legacy was received around this time which funded an additional ward and electric light but it was conditional on the Home being opened all year thus changing the previous pattern of winter closing.

Although considered by the new NHS, the Home was not taken over by them in 1948 but, for the next 50 years, it had most of its patients referred from the Health Board. These were ambulant cases since the home was not set up for nursing. The home received a daily rate per patient from the Board and it also purchased much of its medical sundries through NHS stores such as at Raigmore and Craig Dunain. Most patients came from the Inverness hospitals with a small number from Nairn Town and County. There was the occasional private patient. In the mid-1980s, 40% of patients came from Inverness burgh and county, with Ross and

ⁱ Whose legacy also financed the maternity extension at Nairn Hospital.

ⁱⁱ Legal conveyance of the property to them was only completed in 2004 through Highland Council, presumably to pave the way for its closure and disposal

Cromarty and Nairn each providing around 20%. The balance came mainly from other northern areas.

In April 1971, due to difficulties in obtaining staffing, the management contemplated closing the Home and contacted Highland Health Board regarding the possibility of it being taken over. A Health Board sub-committee subsequently visited³¹ but there was no further action. By 1974, there was again difficulty in recruiting staff and approaches were again made to the Health Board which, by then, regularly used nine of the Home's 11 beds. The Area Medical Committee thought the home was useful and should be transferred to the Health Board. The proposal was, however, turned down by the Secretary of State.

Building improvements continued. A large sun lounge was built in 1965. In 1974, the kitchen and matron's quarters were modernised and extended and oil central heating was installed. A porch was built in 1980. By the 1980s it was becoming unrealistic to expect the now 12 bed home to function with a sole matron and an assistant was required. An appeal for £31,000 was launched which was raised within three months. It included £9,800 from Highlands and Islands Development Board,ⁱ £5,000 from the Nairn Common Good Fund and £1,000 from Britoil.ⁱⁱ This funded accommodation for a second resident member of staff, a new garage and improvements in road access and to the garden. By 1993, it had 14 beds.³² In 1998, the matron's flat was extended and the kitchen refurbished and, in 2003, gas central heating was installed. However, despite all these improvements, it gradually became less viable. It finally closed in 2004, to be converted to residential use and was partially demolished in 2007. Thus ended one of Highland's longest running voluntary health care establishments.

ⁱ Now Highlands and Islands Enterprise

ⁱⁱ Britoil was involved with oil platform fabrication at the Ardersier Yard

Matrons

1882 - 93	Mrs MacPherson.	
1893-95-?	Mrs Baddon	
1901 - 26	Miss Macgregor	Died in service
1926	Miss Cameron	Temporary
1927 - 29	Miss Aikman	
1929 - 31	Miss Munro	Got married
1930 - 35	Miss Margaret Mitchell	Went to Newhills Home, Aberdeen. ³³
1936 - 37	Miss Craigen	Formerly of Fever Hospital
1937 - 39	Miss Mitchell (again)	Called for War service
1940 - 45	Home used by County Council for child evacuees	
1945 - 58	Miss Mitchell (again)	
1959 - 65	Mrs Babington	
1965 - 68	Miss J Finnie	
1969 - 70	Mrs D Gray	
1970 - 71	Mrs Bennet	
1972 - 79	Miss C Anderson	
1979 - 89	Mrs F Lindsay	Assistant matron from at least 1983. ³⁴
1989 - 92	Mrs S Manson	
1992	Mrs M Banks	

Source: Stewart D & Burnett: Management minutes

References

- ¹ Appeal document issued August 1892; Burdett's 1923 *op. cit.*
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- ³ Northern Chronicle and General Advertiser 1 July 1885
- ⁴ Aberdeen Weekly Journal 26 June 1885
- ⁵ Highland News 26 April 1886
- ⁶ Northern Chronicle and General Advertiser 5 May 1886
- ⁷ Northern Scot 21 September 1889
- ⁸ Nairnshire Telegraph 19 February 1907
- ⁹ Nairnshire Telegraph 19 February 1907
- ¹⁰ Nairnshire Telegraph 17 April 1923
- ¹¹ *ibid*
- ¹² Nairnshire Telegraph 23 Jun 1925
- ¹³ Nairnshire Telegraph 20 Oct 1928
- ¹⁴ P&J 29 April 1936
- ¹⁵ Inverness Courier 19 July 1892
- ¹⁶ Management Committee Minutes 27 April 1892
- ¹⁷ Dictionary of Scottish Architects www.scottisharchitect.org.uk
- ¹⁸ Highland Historical Environmental Record; Inverness Chronicle June 28, 1892
- ¹⁹ Stewart D & Burnett M 100 Years of the Convalescent Home Nairn 1994
- ²⁰ Medical Officer of Health for Moray and Nairn Annual Report 1931
- ²¹ Cameron, Isobel *Our Convalescent* 1951 p8
- ²² Management Committee minutes
- ²³ Elgin Courant 14 April 1896
- ²⁴ Highland News 10 June 1899
- ²⁵ P&J 25 July 1917
- ²⁶ Nairnshire Telegraph 4 July 1922
- ²⁷ Management Com Min 27 April 1904: 24 October 1917: 9 December 1921, 11 April 1923
- ²⁸ 1936 Annual Report
- ²⁹ Highland Council, Report by Dir Legal Service 11 December 2003
- ³⁰ Scottish Hospitals Survey (1946) Report on the Northern East. Edinburgh
- ³¹ Northern Region Highland Health Board Vol. 20 p71: Vol. 25 p140
- ³² Stewart D & Burnett M *op. cit.*
- ³³ P&J 13 March 1936
- ³⁴ P&J 14 November 1983