

Havant Joint District Hospital (Infectious Diseases Hospital) Robert West



Main entrance and medical staff accommodation with hospital at the rear.

The Havant Joint District Hospital (Infectious Diseases Hospital) was in existence for only just over 40 years – from 1894 to 1936 – and was located south of the Portsmouth to Chichester railway line and west of Park Road North, where the Central Retail Park now stands.

The first known provision for isolating infectious disease cases in Havant was the so-called 'Pest House' at Stockheath. This was a cottage on the western side of the heath which, together with some adjoining land, was acquired by the Havant Union in 1858 (initially rented but later purchased outright) *for the reception of smallpox and other patients.*¹ This news had obviously not been conveyed to the Poor Law Board in London, however, for in November 1859 they

wrote to the Guardians to complain about the lack of provision for such cases and cited the example of one George Loton who, it was claimed, had been kept in the workhouse whilst infected. The Guardians resolved that they would write to the board, informing them of the Stockheath house, and that, in any case, 'George Loton is dead'.²

This is the only instance recorded in the Guardians' minutes of the Stockheath house being used, but there must surely have been others because, in June 1876, it was decided to sell the Stockheath property and erect new facilities on a piece of land adjoining the northern end of the workhouse garden. (The garden occupied the site now used by the Fire Station in Park Way). Just over one acre of land was purchased by the Workhouse Master, James Weeks, for the purpose.

By 1879 plans had been drawn up for a building to be erected (to the designs of Portsmouth architect Alfred Hudson) and a loan of £1,000 had been arranged to pay for it. Not everyone, however, was in agreement, for one of the Guardians, Mr. Hipkin, put forward a motion that *seeing that no case of fever had occurred for the last ten years a fever hospital was not necessary*.³

This was, however, firmly rejected.

By the end of 1880 it was reported that the new building was *finished and ready for the reception of patients*⁴ but although it was invariably referred to as a hospital it was in reality no more than an isolation unit, no different essentially to the old Stockheath 'Pest House', with a piped water supply, but no gas, and without any dedicated staff, medical or otherwise. As part of the union workhouse it should really have been for the use of pauper patients only, but it is clear that it was also taking in non-paupers, most notably the union's own Relieving Officer, Edward Bryan, who contracted smallpox in June 1883. In fact

the summer and autumn of that year must have seen a mini-epidemic of that disease in Havant, for the workhouse nurse, Nurse Anderson, was also struck down, and three nurses had to be hired from the Workhouse Infirmary Nurses Association to deal with the smallpox cases.⁵

Of all the infectious diseases there is no doubt that smallpox was the most feared, not only because of its high mortality rate but also because of the scars that it so often left upon its survivors. It had made its first appearance –

at least in its most virulent form – in the late 17th century, not long after the final elimination of the plague, and proved a scourge throughout the 18th and most of the 19th century. It first appears to have seriously struck Havant in 1723, when it was reported that there had been 264 cases and no less than 61 deaths⁶ and returned in 1821 when a major outbreak in Chichester spread first to Bosham and then to the Havant area.⁷

Its gradual elimination from the mid-19th century onwards (it ceased to be endemic in Britain in 1908) was the result of increasingly widespread vaccination, with – eventually – the compulsory vaccination of all infants. But attempts to combat the disease initially through inoculation had been taking place since the 1720s and in the 1770s the Havant surgeon William Mant was offering to inoculate patients for a fee of two guineas (£2.10p).⁸

Not that such measures were universally approved, even when they were shown to be effective. An anti-vaccination movement began in 1874 and as late as 1896 a National Anti-Vaccination League was formed. Whether the then Chairman of the Havant Union Board of Guardians, Francis Foster, was a member is uncertain, but he was most definitely not a supporter, and was prosecuted more than once for

failing to have his children immunised. In the course of a lively debate on the topic at a meeting of the Guardians in May 1896 he declared that:

*Whatever resolution the Board passed he should act as he liked with his own children. He had seen cases resulting from vaccination which were quite as loathsome as smallpox.*⁹

There was in fact a national smallpox epidemic at the time (one of the last although a final outbreak occurred in 1901-2) and although Havant seems to have been spared Emsworth was not, for an infected tramp staying at a lodging house in the Hermitage passed the disease on to at least three other people. As a result people in Emsworth were re-vaccinated, a tent was set up on Westbourne Common for the reception of patients and the Westbourne Union made immediate plans to erect their own Isolation Hospital.

The fact that non-pauper patients in the 1880s were being admitted into the Havant workhouse facility eventually came to the notice of the Local Government Board who, in August 1887 wrote to the Guardians emphasising the isolation unit was:

*Only legally available for the treatment of destitute persons and that every person sent there becomes a pauper and must be attended to by the Medical Officer of the Workhouse.*¹⁰

Initially the Guardians proposed that the Isolation building should be transferred to the Havant Rural Sanitary Authority:

*For the use of the inhabitants of the Havant Union including the Urban Sanitary Authority.*¹¹

who would also contribute towards the running costs.

But eventually it was decided that a completely new authority, the Havant Joint Hospital Board, should be set up comprised of delegates from the Havant Urban and Rural Sanitary Authorities. (After 1895 these became Havant Urban District Council, Havant Rural District Council and a totally new creation Warblington Urban District Council.) There seems, however, to have been some considerable delay in establishing the new authority – much to the exasperation of the Local Government Board – and it only finally came into existence in February 1893.

Unfortunately the records of the meeting of the Board survive only from 1924 to 1932, but one of its very first decisions must have been the radical one to replace the workhouse facility (which had only been in existence for 13 years) with a brand new purpose built isolation hospital, for by early July 1893 tenders were being put out for its construction. By the end of the month the tender of George Stallard of £1,896 for the erection of hospital wards, administration block and nurses' accommodation block (to the designs of Portsmouth architect Charles Vernon-Inkpen) had been accepted. There were also separate contracts for the erection of a boundary wall (won by S. Rogers at £28 12s.) and the laying of a concrete area of 70ft x 30ft for the erection of tents in the event of an epidemic (also won by Rogers at £52).¹⁴

It was erected on the site of the old workhouse isolation block, although some extra land was purchased to accommodate the more extensive complex of buildings as well as a garden.

There is no record of the exact date of the opening of the hospital, but it must have been sometime in late August or early September 1894, since at the beginning of August the tenders of W. Leng and J. Mosdell for the furnishing of the board room and administrative block had

been accepted, whilst at the end of September Dr. Theodore Thomson from the Local Government Board inspected the Hospital in the course of his visit to Havant to report on the state of the town's health.¹⁵ He noted the existence of two wards containing a total of 16 beds, but was disappointed to find that it *had no disinfected apparatus or special preparations for cholera.*¹⁶

There were two notable things about Havant's brand new isolation hospital.

The first was its cost. According to Kelly's Directory for 1895 the total sum spent on it – which must have included building, furnishing and equipping came to no less than £5,000. This was probably the largest amount spent on any single public undertaking in Havant to that date. The second was its location. Most isolation hospitals were erected in the remotest spot possible, Westbourne's, for example, was on Emsworth Common, Fareham's was out at Catisfield, Portsmouth's at Milton and Gosport's at Elson. None of these was adjacent to any significant centre of population. The Havant hospital, by contrast, although not immediately adjacent to any residences (at least not until the erection of Potash Terrace in 1902) was no more than a few hundred yards from the very centre of the town. What is more surprising is that no objections seem to have been raised to it being there. This is in stark contrast to Gosport, where the mere proposal to erect the Elson hospital in 1887 led to fierce and sustained local opposition. (It was not finally built until 1899 and even then had to rely on the generosity of a single private benefactor for its creation.)

The hospital board, which ran this impressive new institution, was comprised of delegates from the three local authorities, which were its catchment area, and met once a month in the hospital board room. It was financed by contributions (officially known as precepts) from

each of the three councils. The supervision of all medical matters – including the admission and discharge of patients – was in the hands of the Medical Officer or his deputy, but the day to day running of the hospital was firmly in the hands of the Matron (the first being Miss Crosby) and the Hospital Rule Book sets out her duties in some detail. She was to have:

General control and charge of the Hospital, administrative buildings, nurses, servants and property therein. She is to devote her whole time to the service of the Board and to use her diligence in nursing patients, in instructing nurses, and in disinfecting, in the Hospital-house, clothing and other things within the limits of the Hospital grounds. She shall be responsible for the due administration of medicines prescribed.

She shall keep such books as may from time to time be required. She shall not absent herself from the Hospital or the boundary thereof without the consent of the Medical Officer or his Deputy, nor for longer than the time he shall allow.¹⁷

Under her was a senior (or charge) nurse and the ordinary nurses, usually three or four in number. There was also a cook, a wards maid (or general servant) and what was originally referred to as a ‘messenger’ who was really a combined caretaker, gardener and laundryman. It was also his job to drive the hospital ambulance. In the 1880s this had simply been a ‘fever cab’ which was no more than an ordinary cab with frosted glass windows (to ensure anonymity) which brought infected patients from their homes to the isolation unit. But at some stage the board acquired a proper ambulance, initially horse-drawn but replaced in the 1920s with a motor vehicle. In the very brief article on the isolation hospital in the original *Making of Havant* series in the 1970s the reminiscences of one local resident are recorded who remembered:

*The excitement caused in the town in the early 1900s whenever the hospital 'black-maria type' horse-drawn ambulance, driven by Mr. Tassell, trundled through the streets conveying fever patients to isolation.*¹⁸

The rule book was also very clear about visitors, who were at all costs to be discouraged. Indeed the only visitors permitted were the relations and close friends of patients who were '*dangerously ill*' (emphasised in italics) and then only with the express permission of the medical officer or his deputy. No children were to be allowed and once admitted visitors were on no account to touch patients and at all times to sit at a distance from them. The friends and relatives of other patients might, on application to the Matron, see them through the ward windows, but such visits should be *as brief as possible*.

Moreover it was strongly advised not to enter any public vehicle immediately after leaving the Hospital. In addition, in any case of smallpox;

No one should attempt to enter the wards of the Hospital without having been previously properly re-vaccinated, and if he lives in a house where smallpox has occurred he is urged to apply at once to the Public Vaccinator in order that he and the remainder of the occupants of such house may be vaccinated, no matter whether they have, or not, been previously vaccinated.

Because all records relating to the hospital board do not survive from before 1924, and as their monthly meetings were almost never so much as mentioned in the press, we know effectively nothing about the day to day running of the hospital and must gather what scraps we can from other sources. But we can be sure that the need for a proper isolation hospital was soon made apparent, for in October 1895 there was a serious outbreak of typhoid in Bedhampton, with most of the 15

confirmed cases being taken to the hospital, whilst scarlet fever (another infectious disease) was also on the increase there, with the board schools being closed on the advice of the Medical Officer, Dr. Norman.¹⁹

The Havant area in the late 19th Century was, by and large, not an unhealthy place – despite the lack of mains drainage – but there were areas of slums and deprivation, most notably Somerstown (known locally as Bugs Row) and the houses in and around Brockhampton Lane. Indeed one letter-writer to the *Portsmouth Evening News* in 1882, who signed himself 'Observer' stated that:

*There is constant fever in the locality ... and ... it is impossible to have health in Brockhampton Lane unless drainage is improved and a good supply of water furnished to every house.*²⁰

But the hospital was not always busy. For example in one of the very few press reports of a hospital board meeting in January 1897 it was noted that it currently contained *only two patients who were practically convalescent and who would be discharged early next week.*²¹

Indeed there were just 27 cases in total for the whole of the year ending March 31st 1897.²²

On the other hand the 1901 census records no less than 15 patients (all of them children between the ages of four and 14 and in May that year the Medical Officer, Dr. Norman, in his annual report, listed eight deaths that had occurred in the hospital over the previous 12 months: five from diphtheria, two from enteric fever and one from scarlet fever, although no infectious disease fatalities had occurred outside of the hospital.²³

The census also gives us some details about the staff. The Matron was now Elizabeth (Lily) Maddock, 28-years-old and born in Ireland. Under

her were just two nurses, Carrie Blunderbus, 30-years-old and born in India, and Minnie Brice(28) who was also Irish. The wards'-maid was 18 year old Amy Crosfield and the cook Emma Dacomb (58). The 'Messenger' or caretaker is not recorded as he did not live on the premises at this time.

By the time the next census was taken in 1911 the hospital had acquired a new Matron, Harriet White, 39 years old and born in Faversham, Kent; whilst under her were no less than six nurses Ethel Lovell, Ethel Parrott, Annie Milward, Clara Baines, Beatrice Talbot and Ada Lowton (whose ages ranged from 26 to 41 years) as well as a housemaid Annie Cutler (the only member of staff born locally) and a cook Mary Kerr. There were, however, just eleven patients, all children between four and 12-years-old.

The only incident of note that I can find in the years between 1901 and 1911 was the suicide of one of the nurses, Sarah Lawson, who in November 1906 took an overdose of morphine and pills. It seems that she had recently become very depressed following a bout of flu and was worried that, at the age of 40, she would soon be too old to continue her nursing career.²⁴

We also know very little about the hospital in the period from shortly before to just after the First World War, but from 1924 to 1932, when the minute books of the monthly meetings of the Havant Joint Hospital Board survive, we do begin to get a somewhat clearer idea, although the minutes themselves deal mainly with finance and maintenance; medical matters rarely arise.

In 1925 the precepts (or contributions) from the three local authorities amounted to £1,662 per annum, with almost exactly half – £830 – coming from the Havant Rural District Council, whilst Havant Urban District Council contributed £448 and Warblington Urban

District Council £384. By 1930, however, the total had risen to £2,340 per annum. (In 1908, the only year prior to 1924 for which we have any accounts, it had been just £585).

The three main items of expenditure were (i) staff salaries; (ii) building and maintenance and (iii) provisions and supplies.

The largest salary was paid to the Medical Officer (up until 1928 this was Dr. A. S. Norman who was succeeded by his son Burford Norman) who received £75 per annum. Next came the Matron (Ethel Lovell) who received £70, then the Charge Nurse (£60). The ordinary nurses received around £35 to £40, although junior nurses received less. These were not huge sums, but all meals and accommodation were provided and there was also a small uniform allowance. The caretaker also received around £35 to £40 per annum. Up until 1928 this position was always filled by a local man who did not reside on the premises, but with the appointment in April of that year of Mr. Billott, who lived in Horndean, it was resolved to erect a cottage for him in the hospital grounds.²⁵

Other additions to, or improvements of, the hospital included the erection of glass-roofed verandas in 1922; heaters were provided for them three years later. The re-decoration of the administration block in August 1925 (at a cost of £145), and an extension to the building housing the ambulance in 1928 when a motor vehicle replaced the horse-drawn one.

The third significant item of expenditure was the purchase of food, cleaning and disinfecting products, and drugs and other medical items. A list of food provisions for the half year ending September 1930 comprised:

Baking powder; Bread; Butter; Bacon; Beef juice; Biscuits; Corned beef; Cocoa; Coffee; Chickory; Cornflour; Currants; Custard powder; Calves

foot jelly; Dripping; Eggs (fresh and powdered); Essence of beef; Fish; Flour; Jelly; Lard; Meat; Milk; Marmalade; Mustard; Mineral water; Pepper; Candied peel; Rice; Raisins; Sugar (lump, white, demarara and caster); Salt; Sausages; Spirits (brandy); Sultanas; Tapioca; Tea; Tinned fruit (apricots, peaches, pears and pineapple slices); Treacle; Vinegar.

This was probably a far more varied and nutritious diet than most of the patients would have received at home.

The medical supplies comprised of:

Absorbent wool; Glycerine; Lint; Boracic lint; Liquorice powder; Listerine; Lysol; Monsol tablets; Ointment (zinc and boracic); Starch and zinc powder; Surgical tow; Turpentine; Vaseline.

In October 1931 with the economic condition of the country in a very poor state, a letter was received from the Ministry of Health asking for savings to be made, but the Board were of the opinion that:

In view of the small amount of salaries paid to their officers they do not consider that any reduction should be asked of them, and they cannot see how expenditure can be further reduced, as the strictest economy in working their hospital has always been exercised.²⁶

In April 1932 the Havant Joint Hospital Board was wound up, and control of the hospital was transferred to a new Isolation Hospital Committee of the Havant Urban District Council. So, for the last few years of its existence we are once again deprived of any records regarding the running of the hospital. But one of the most noteworthy events of its last few years must have been the death, on 1 February 1935 of Matron Ethel May Lovell, at the age of 53. She had been Matron for some 21 years, but had actually been on the staff for even longer (she is recorded on the 1911 Census).

She died after contracting blood poisoning in the course of her duties at the hospital and her funeral, at St Joseph's Catholic Church in West Street on 4 February, was attended by a large number of mourners, including local councillors and other dignitaries, as well as many of her former patients.²⁷

On 1 April 1936 the isolation hospital was closed and its remaining patients were transferred to the Milton hospital in Portsmouth. This was the fate of most isolation hospitals in the 1930s (Westbourne's, for example, closed in 1933) for with the incidence of infectious disease generally on the decline it was felt that cases were best dealt with either in a smaller number of regional hospitals, or, more usually, within general hospitals.

In fact as an institution the isolation hospital had a very brief existence. It only became the norm to treat all serious infectious disease cases in separate hospitals in the late 19th century (save for smallpox which was always the exception) when the Contagion Theory of disease was finally confirmed, replacing the old Miasma Theory which had been the prevailing orthodoxy in the mid-19th century. Miasma Theory maintained that many, if not most diseases were spread not by person-to-person contact or through polluted water supplies but by 'miasmas' that spread through the air and emanated from decaying organic matter, especially sewage and human corpses.²⁸ The vast majority of isolation hospitals therefore were erected between 1875 and 1900 and few survived until after the Second World War.

Shortly after the hospital closed there was a proposal to turn it into a Public Assistance Institution – i.e. a workhouse – to replace the old one in West Street which had closed at almost exactly the same time, but this did not materialise. However the adjacent – and recently opened –

Havant War Memorial Hospital did take over some of the equipment as well as the mortuary, ambulance garage and a portion of the garden.²⁹

During and after the Second World War the site was used as the council depot and county ambulance station. The nurses' accommodation block being converted into a house and flat for council employees and an office for ambulance staff.

The buildings were demolished in 1972 and the site was used as a car park. Only a section of the south boundary wall survived into the 21st century.

Later the whole area was cleared, including the row of cottages known as Potash Terrace, and large retail units were erected to form the Central Retail Park.

All traces of both the hospital buildings and the grounds have now been obliterated.

NOTES

1 Havant Union Board of Guardians Minutes 11.5.1858 HCRO PL3/10)

2 Minutes 3.12.1859

3 Minutes 27.3.1879

4 Minutes 16.12.1880

5 Minutes 28.6.1883; 20.9.1883; 4.10.1883

6 J.R.Smith. *The Speckled Monster: Smallpox in England with particular reference to Essex*, p.58

7 Diana Crook *Defying the Demon: Smallpox in Sussex*, p.99

8 *Hampshire Chronicle* 24.3.1777. *Inoculation was the injection of a small dose of the smallpox virus itself; vaccination was the injection of the milder cowpox virus.*

9 *Portsmouth Evening News* 2.5.1896

10 Minutes 18.8.1887.

- 11 Minutes 21.11.1889
- 12 *Hampshire Telegraph* 1.7.1893
- 13 *Portsmouth Evening News* 21.7.1893. Stallard's was the lowest of several bids the highest being £2,100.
- 14 *Portsmouth Evening News* 21.7.1893; 12.8.1893
- 15 *Portsmouth Evening News* 4.8.1894
- 16 *Report on the Health of Havant; 25th-27th Sept. 1894. British Parliamentary Papers* Vol. 17 p.119-20
- 17 CRO 64M 76/DDC 18. The Rules were drawn up in July 1893 and re-issued ten years later.
- 18 *Making of Havant* Vol III p.23-4.
- 19 *Portsmouth Evening News* 12.10.1895
- 20 *Portsmouth Evening News* 21.9.1882 under the headline *A Disgrace to Havant*.
- 21 *Portsmouth Evening News* 16.1.1897
- 22 *Hampshire Telegraph* 5.4.1897
- 23 *Portsmouth Evening News* 26.5.1901
- 24 *Portsmouth Evening News* 23.11.1906
- 25 Havant Joint Hospital Board Minutes of Meetings 16.1028 HCRO 72M 84/HH1 and HH2.
- 26 Minutes 27.10.1931
- 27 *Portsmouth Evening News* 1.2.1935; 4.2.1935
- 28 C.J. Longcroft, for example, was most certainly a believer as the section on cemeteries in his *Hundred of Bosmere* (1857) shows, (p.78-9)
- 29 *Hampshire Telegraph* 1.4.1936



Rear view of the medical staff accommodation with nurses in the doorways.



The Havant Union Workhouse in West Street.