

9. ORIGINAL NOBLE'S HOSPITAL

Manx Museum

In 1888 the first custom-built hospital was built on the island, funded by businessman Henry Bloom Noble. It had 50 beds, but by the end of the nineteenth century it had become too small. The new site on Westmoreland Road was opened in 1912.

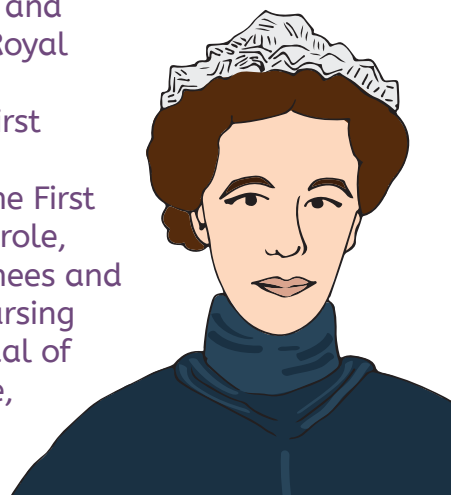


DR J.H.F SPENCER

John Henry Frederick Spencer was born in Maughold in 1813. In 1839 he was elected as the first surgeon of the Strand Street Dispensary, earning £50 a year. For the next nine years he worked hard for the Douglas poor, raising funds and working hard to improve medical care. He often donated his own money to support the dispensary and encouraged smallpox vaccinations to prevent the disease. Doctor Spencer was noticed for both his dedication and his kindness. In his first year as surgeon, he caught typhoid fever while visiting a patient in the Douglas slums, and nearly died, suffering recurring attacks of illness during the winter months. He explained his decision to resign in 1849 by saying "my health has so much suffered as a result of the constant anxiety I have felt in having so many lives in my hands, together with the fatigue I have endured". Doctor Spencer died suddenly after a short illness in 1850, at the age of just 37.

ESTHER JANE BRIDSON

Esther Jane Bridson had trained and worked as a ward sister at the Royal Southern Hospital in Liverpool. She became the matron of the first Noble's Hospital (now the Manx Museum) in 1905. She. During the First World War she continued in the role, nursing wounded soldiers, internees and civilians, despite shortages in nursing staff. She was awarded the medal of St John in recognition of her role, and retired in 1922.



JJ FROWDE

John James Frowde was a pharmacist, optician, and local historian. He opened his pharmacy in 1885 and was famous in Douglas for his homemade remedies, including his Anodyne Cough Elixir. He was a keen photographer and was fascinated by the history of Douglas, collecting huge amounts of information on the layout of the old streets.

Frowde's pharmacy remained in his family after his death, and is now Hemensley's Pharmacy at 1 Windsor Road. The shop still contains many of its original features.



NELLY BRENNAN

Eleanor Brennan became a washerwoman when she was orphaned at the age of just 16. When cholera broke out on the Isle of Man in 1832, the poor of Douglas had very few options. Many lived in unsanitary slum housing and medical care was expensive. But Nelly's Christian faith led her to nurse the sick in their homes, washing their clothes and preparing meals for them. She also donated her own money and cared for orphans in her own home.

She continued her nursing through more epidemics of cholera, smallpox and typhoid, as 'the well-known and unwearied visitor of the sick and dying'. In 1848 she had a house built at what is now 3 Willow Terrace. In 1850 Nelly became the first matron of the new Hospital and Dispensary on Fort Street. She could sometimes be strict and sharp-tongued, but was greatly admired for her devotion, faith and selflessness. An impressive monument in St George's Churchyard commemorates her death in 1859.



ROUTE: Walk down Crellin's Hill and turn right onto the Strand to reach (1). Continue to Victoria Street, turn left and then right to reach Fort Street and (2). Continue to the North Quay to look in the direction of (3). Return back to Lord Street, and turn right past the old Hanover St school building for (4). Turn left up Church Street to find (5) on the left. Carry on up Lord Street, cross North Circular Road and walk up Westmoreland Road to see (6). Turn right along Desmesne Road for (7) and (8). Continue back to Woodbourne Road, walk past Trinity Methodist, turn left up Rosemount and then right into Willow's Terrace to see (8). Cross Woodbourne Road and walk down Windsor Road to (9).



Healthcare on the Isle of Man Key Sites 1840 - 1939

Trail takes approximately one hour.

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1. STRAND STREET DISPENSARY

10 Strand Street (site of Boots Opticians)

The Douglas Medical Dispensary was a charity set up to provide medical care for the poor, and in 1841 it opened a premises on Strand Street. This had six beds and was run by Dr JHF Spencer until 1849. The first matron was the Widow Kelly, hired in 1841.

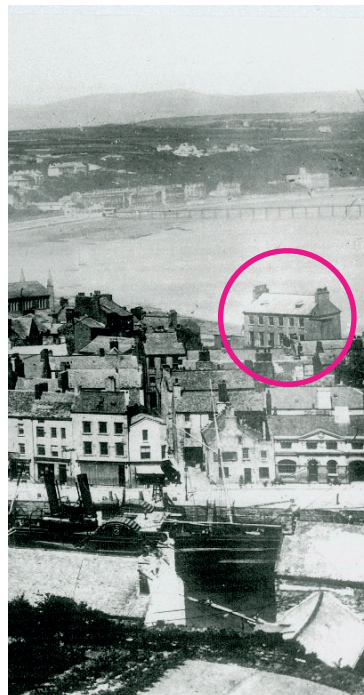
In its first six months, records shows that it treated 261 people. Eight died, but 185 were cured, and 35 cases of typhus and smallpox were diagnosed and cured, preventing the spread of these infectious diseases in the community. However, by the end of the decade, funds were dwindling and the need for a new site was discussed.

2. FORT STREET HOSPITAL AND DISPENSARY

(on the left, probably near the site of the Villiers car park)

There was a lot of discussion around the best new site for the Strand Street Dispensary, but it was eventually situated on Fort Street. This placed it near the Douglas slums, and almshouses (situated on the Lord Street car park).

The doors first opened to patients in 1850. The new Hospital and Dispensary had 14 beds. 225 cases of smallpox were treated there in 1851, and 300 people, mostly children, were vaccinated against the disease. Nelly Brennan was chosen as its first matron in 1849.



3. WHITE HOE FEVER HOSPITAL

(in the direction of Braddan, up past the Nunnery)

In 1836, it was proposed at a Provisional Meeting that it was **“most expedient and desirable that a Fever Hospital should be established”**. However, it wasn’t until 1889 that White Hoe Fever Hospital opened in Braddan to quarantine and treat victims of infectious diseases.

Originally set up to contain smallpox, the hospital was also used to treat diphtheria and other infectious diseases. To prevent the spread of diseases, it was located out of Douglas, along the Old Castletown Road.



4. ‘LITTLE HELL’

Area around Barrack Street and Shaw’s Brow

The cholera epidemic of 1832 impacted the whole island, but Douglas was the area most affected. The Douglas poor lived in Lower Douglas, near Fort Street, Lord Street and the Quay, crammed into back-to-back houses. The area between Barrack Street and Shaw’s Brow was called Thornhill, and was so cramped and dirty that it was known as ‘Little Hell’.

A letter to the Lieutenant-Governor, published in the Manx Sun in January 1844, pointed out that:

“The health of the labouring and poorer classes is... frequently endangered, by the noxious vapours that continually arise from the stagnant waters and filth that lay on the surface on the most densely populated streets”

He wrote about piles of sewage heaped around the water pump on one street.

March 1878 the Special Commissioner of the ‘Sanitary Record’ wrote in *Mona’s Herald* that ***“In the older parts of the town the state of the narrow streets and of the backyards is horrible in the extreme”***. He found up to 50 people living in a single house on Hanover Street, and said that he was ***“thoroughly nauseated at the abominable stench, and sick at heart at the misery I had beheld”***.

5. ST GEORGE’S CHURCHYARD

Nellie Brennan memorial and Cholera grave

Starting in 1832, the island suffered several cholera epidemics. This was a water-borne disease that led to agonising stomach pains and uncontrollable vomiting and diarrhoea. It eventually led its victims to become dehydrated and turn blue. A cholera patient could show symptoms in the morning, and be dead by the end of the day.

Over 200 people died in the first epidemic, and many are buried in an unmarked grave in St George’s churchyard. Nellie Brennan famously helped to nurse those suffering from the disease, and is also commemorated in the graveyard.

6. THE ‘OLD’ NOBLE’S HOSPITAL

Westmoreland Road

Built in 1912, this hospital site replaced the original Noble’s hospital, which became the Manx Museum.



7. JANE CROOKALL MATERNITY HOME

29 Desmesne Road

Up to the early twentieth century, women on the Isle of Man gave birth at home, even if they lived in a single room or terrible conditions. However, in 1927 the Mayor of Douglas, AB Crookall, gifted the town a house for a purpose-built maternity home in memory of his wife Jane. It had twelve beds and 214 births were recorded there in its first year without a single maternal death.

In 1939 the maternity home moved to purpose-built premises around the corner, on Kensington Road.

8. NELLY BRENNAN’S HOUSE

3 Willow Terrace

Nelly Brennan was the daughter of a laundress and a sailor lost at sea. When the cholera epidemic broke out in 1832–3, Nelly risked infection to care for the poorest victims of the disease. She also worked as a laundress and ran a boarding-house before becoming the matron of the Fort Street Hospital and Dispensary in 1849.

In 1848 she bought a plot of land and built herself a cottage. A strict Methodist, she named it Wesley Cottage after John Wesley.