

“PEMBROKESHIRE HOSPITALS FROM 1822.”

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“There were no hospitals in Pembrokeshire until 1822. Before then criminals, lunatics, and often the poor and sick, were incarcerated in Haverfordwest Castle. The end of the Napoleonic war in 1815 saw a swift decline in the army and navy and an increase in number of criminals in the county. The County Asylum act 1808 and the Poor Law act of 1834 initiated the building of a 20 bed asylum in Haverfordwest in 1822 removing lunatics from the castle which was converted to a prison. Later three 100 bed workhouses, each with an infirmary, were built at Haverfordwest near St Thomas Church, at Narberth and at Pembroke. In 1897 the BMJ gave the Haverfordwest workhouse infirmary a lacerating report; “*It has rarely been our lot to visit a workhouse infirmary more unsuited for its purpose*”. (ref 1) Soon after, cottage hospitals for 6-16 patients sprang up in Tenby, Pembroke and Pembroke Dock. HMS Saturn, 74 guns, had fought with Nelson when he famously *turned a blind eye* at the battle of Copenhagen in 1801 and provided a hospital in Milford Haven from 1825. The opening of a large asylum in Carmarthen in 1865 meant that the asylum near St Thomas church closed and in 1874 became the Haverfordwest and Pembrokeshire Infirmary, including an operating theatre. The Pembrokeshire County War Memorial hospital nearby opened in 1923 with 100 beds. (ref 2) This was supplemented in 1930 when the three Workhouses became public assistance hospitals. A 100-bed King Edward VII Memorial TB hospital for children was located at Kensington Castle in 1923, many staying there for more than 10 years. The Battle of the Atlantic, 1939-45, meant 10 new RAF airfields being built in the county. The air-surface-vessel radar essential to detect U-boats from seaplanes and other aircraft was developed by EG Bowen FRS, a physicist from Swansea (ref 3), who supervised a group of scientists at St Athan and Pembroke Dock, many of whom were later awarded Nobel Prizes, knighthoods and FRSs, most for subsequent work in medicine. The RAF were supported by a new 100 bed “hut hospital” at Withybush. This provided NHS medical services until 1975 when, after an intense 15-year battle, Dr Eirian Williams led local doctors to obtain a new Withybush District hospital (see *Events pre 2010* in ref 4). He was a single handed physician, an internationally recognised expert on Brucellosis and not new to hut hospitals. With the war still raging, he volunteered, aged 19, with 95 other London medical students, one to each hut, to help the 16,000 moribund inmates of Belsen Concentration Camp.(refs 5 & 6) This experience imbued him to fight for what became the 1991 Sunday Times best UK general district hospital. He died shortly before this remarkable award.

1.BMJ Report on The Nursing and Administration of Provincial Workhouse Infirmaries. www.workhouses.org.uk/BMJ/Haverforwest.shtml

2.Richards W.L. The County Hospital Story. 1988. Pembrokeshire Health Authority.

3.Bowen EG. Radar Days. 1987. Adam Hilger, Bristol.

4.<http://www.zen142533.zen.co.uk/SWATcontd/paedshistory.html>

5.Hargrave, MJ. Bergen Belsen 1945. A Medical Student's Journal. 2014. Imperial College Press. London.

6.Jones JG, Winterbottom O.C. An Anaesthetist at Belsen. RoCA Bulletin. Sept 2016. Issue 99.