

## History of Rainhill Hospital (Asylum) 1851 - 1991

Rainhill Hospital (formerly named Rainhill Lunatic Asylum and later Rainhill Mental Hospital) was a large psychiatric hospital situated a few miles outside of St Helens. The original building was designed by Harvey Lonsdale Elmes (the architect of St George's Hall in Liverpool), who died in 1847, four years before the hospital opened in 1851 as one of the Lancashire county asylums. The asylum was badly needed: it was built to accommodate 300 patients and opened with approximately 220. By 1852, the committee was having to admit 400 patients and from then onwards was constantly reporting that the asylum was overcrowded.

Expansion began in an attempt to accommodate these increasingly large numbers of patients. In 1859, additional wards were built to house another 228 patients and 32 single rooms were added to existing wards, along with a recreation hall and new workshops. In 1860 it was decided that the hospital should purchase the farm on the opposite side of the road, for £2100.

The problem of accommodation was aggravated by the fact that chronic and incurable patients were being admitted to the hospital, using beds that could otherwise have been taken by acute cases. The hospital committee wanted these cases to be taken by the local workhouses. In 1877, the Medical Superintendent, Dr Rogers, started a crusade for a new asylum. He decided that if land were available, it would be an advantage to expand Rainhill Asylum, rather than build a separate establishment, and to split the site between chronic and acute cases.

In 1878, the county authorities purchased land for the building of the annexe. It was designed by G E Grayson to house around 1000 patients and was opened in April 1887; it was used for patients whose conditions had seriously deteriorated.

Further expansion of the hospital included the building of a detached Infectious Diseases Hospital between 1892 and 1895, a Nurse's Home which opened in 1896, the Roman Catholic Chapel and extensions to both the main building and the annexe in 1898, Reeve Hall was built in 1936 and the old recreation hall it had replaced was converted into kitchens in 1938. In the same year a new Admissions Hospital, latterly the Benedict Clinic, was approved by the committee. During the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, this building was used to accommodate more than 100 patients admitted from the armed forces. By 1949, the building had been vacated and was returned to its intended purpose as an admissions hospital. In 1956 the Hospital

Committee decide to dispose of the hospital farm, which was eventually sold. Rainhill Asylum closed it's gates finally in 1991.

***Courtesy of Anne Slater, Rainhill Civic Society Heritage Group***