How the history of Gibraltar, influenced the origins & subsequent facets of our hospital
Juan Mateos was born in 1520 in the town of Gibraltar which was then under Spanish rule.

He has been described as an innkeeper and made a fortune by dealing in “traffic and commerce”. Later he increased it by lending money.

His retirement came as a result of the substantial wealth acquired by 1567 and he built a house in the upper part of town.

Since life is an unexpected adventure, one day he suddenly decided to devote the rest of his life to nursing the sick locals and any diseased person who arrived in port and for this aim he converted his house into a sick bay.

For 24 years Juan Mateos continued his charitable work but then ran into debt and began to beg. The citizens contributed generously to keep his venture going but by the age of 71 he was old, tired and almost destitute.

He joined the small team of six monks of the Order of San Juan de Dios and donated his house to the said Order who took over the care of the sick people of Gibraltar in 1591.

Thus, in 1591, the first hospital in Gibraltar was officially known as:

El Hospital de San Juan de Dios.

[ The Hospital of St John of God. ]
Juan Mateos' house was situated where until 2005 the old Maternity Ward functioned and that is the actual birthplace of: **ST BERNARD'S HOSPITAL.**

In 1591 the Order of St John of God took over officially the 20 bed hospital. They built a convent and church next to the hospital and managed it for the next 110 years.

Juan Mateos died in 1594 after devoting a lifetime to charity and was mourned by all Gibraltarians. He was buried beside the altar of the hospital church.

It is well documented that in November of 1620 the sick from a squadron of eighteen ships from the Royal Navy, under the command of Sir Robert Marsell, were landed at Gibraltar and treated at the Hospital of San Juan de Dios.

As a result of King Charles II of Spain having no heirs and consequently the War of the Spanish Succession which followed in 1701, Gibraltar was invaded on the 24th July 1704 by British, Dutch, Portuguese, German and Spanish Catalan troops under the command of Admiral George Rooke.

The hospital of San Juan de Dios was converted into the: **BLUE BARRACKS**

but later the site went back to its original use. In 1708 it was used as: **STORES.**

and in 1753 it acquired the name the: **GARRISON HOSPITAL.**

The Franco-Spanish Great Siege of 1779-1783 destroyed practically the whole town and the hospital fell into ruins.

In 1815 the Governor-General George Don, the father of modern Gibraltar, initiated various improvement projects and eventually the “ruinous mass” was converted into the new: **CIVIL HOSPITAL**

It was well equipped and open to all religious persuasions. Maintenance was provided by public subscription and aided by an annual grant from the Government. Contributions were also obtained from paying patients.
On the 28th January 1880, the foundation stone for its reconstruction was laid down by General Lord Napier of Magdala and when finished in December 31st 1882, the hospital received its official badge and to the Castle & Key was added the Serpent of Aesculapius. The new Colonial Government of 1887 rebuilt a portion of the Civil Hospital to commemorate Her Majesty Queen Victoria's Jubilee and in 1889 the Colonial Government changed its name to the Colonial Hospital.
The original Gibraltar Flag
1502
Finally, in 1963 the local Government asked the hospital Chaplain Rev Louis Orfila, to select a name for the hospital.

After many sieges from Spain, however, the Moslems, who held the Rock for 598 years, were forced to surrender the fortress on the 20th August 1462, the feast day of St Bernard of Clairvaux, and he was declared Patron Saint of Gibraltar.

To commemorate our Patron Saint, Rev Orfila informed the Government to rename the hospital:

**ST BERNARD’S HOSPITAL.**

Further developments occurred, but at least some of the originals were left intact. But the oval marble plaque on the side of an altar –like in the old delivery room in Maty Ward was destroyed during the reformations. I saw this around 1958 and although it meant nothing to me at the time it was a dedication to Juan Mateos.
But by the turn of the century, the hospital could not cope with the ever growing medical demand of its population.

New premises were therefore sought by the Government. It was eventually decided to house the hospital in a modern building where a commercial complex called Europort had been built as a result of a reclamation programme from the sea.

The move to the new premises took place in early 2005 and fittingly enough it retained its original name:

ST BERNARD'S HOSPITAL

All this in keeping with the times. Emerging from those days of being a garrison town with a 20 bed hospital, Gibraltar has dusted herself off and started looking worldwide to offer her services.

Although now, not in the original site of Juan Mateos’ house, it nevertheless retains his original insight, that of caring for the sick.
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