

ISLA DE PEDROSA

A LANDSCAPE BETWEEN
WATER AND TIME



 FUNDACIÓN CÁNTABRA
SALUD Y BIENESTAR SOCIAL

Easy-to-read guide



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Presentation of the exhibition

The island of Pedrosa is surrounded
by the calm waters of the Solía estuary.
Today, you can reach it by a bridge,
but for a long time, it was an isolated place.

Even though it is small,
important things have happened on the island.
Many people were cared for here,
and difficult times were also lived.

This exhibition invites you
to discover its history.

The island of Pedrosa is a special place.
Welcome!



*Pedrosa island,
around the 1920s.*

How is the exhibition organised?

1. The island of Pedrosa and its surroundings.
2. The lazaretto of Pedrosa (1826–1904).
3. The National Maritime Sanatorium of Pedrosa (1908–1930).
4. The National Maritime Sanatorium of Pedrosa (1931–2025).
5. The faces of Pedrosa.
6. The island of Pedrosa through time.
7. The theatre.



1. The island of Pedrosa and its surroundings

Illness and health, then and now

The way we understand illness and health has changed a lot over the last 200 years.

In the past, health was seen as a luxury or something offered through charity. Many poor people were cared for in their homes, in shelters or hospitals. The most common diseases were contagious, and there were no effective treatments.

Little by little, thanks to scientific progress, bacteria were discovered and vaccines and antibiotics were developed.

In 1986, the General Health Law was passed. Since then, health has become a right for all people.

Today, medicine faces new challenges, but it continues to look for ways to care for everyone better.



Visit by Queen María Victoria to poor disabled women, in the year 1871.



Nurse caring for a wounded person, in the year 1937.

Medical spaces in contemporary Spain

Places for medical care
have changed
over the centuries.

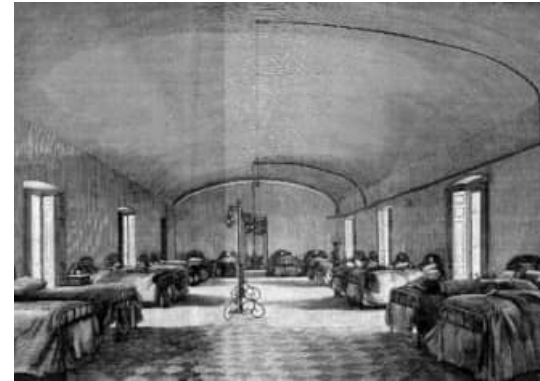
In the past,
they were cold and sad places.
Old convents or large houses were used,
with little light or comfort.

In the 19th century,
after very serious epidemics,
things started to change.
People believed that light, fresh air, and gardens
helped people get better.
Separate buildings were built,
with open galleries and spaces to walk.

Later,
the idea of the “health city” appeared:
places far from towns,
with schools, kitchens, workshops, and green
areas.
They were small worlds for care and healing.

In the 20th century,
speed and efficiency became important.
Health centres and hospitals
were built inside cities.

Today,
the aim is to give more human care.
Hospitals try to be
more comfortable, calm, and friendly,
so that people feel looked after.



*Patients' ward
at the military hospital
in Madrid,
in 1896.*



*The University Hospital
la Princesa
in Madrid,
inaugurated in 1955.*

Medicine in Cantabria, for everyone

In Cantabria,
the history of medicine
has changed a lot over time.

In the past,
getting better depended on
how much money people had.
In villages,
people used home remedies
and helped each other.
In towns and cities,
there were few doctors, some chemists,
and shelters or aid houses.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries,
sanatoriums and clinics were opened,
often private ones.

The most important medical milestone
was the Casa de Salud Valdecilla,
opened in 1929
thanks to Ramón Pelayo's donation.
It was a modern hospital,
with different buildings and many departments.

Today,
Cantabria has more hospitals
in other cities
like Torrelavega, Laredo and Reinosa.
There are also health centres
and organisations that support people.

Medicine is seen as a right,
and care is more human and complete.



*Torrelavega
Shelter-Hospital,
opened in 1890.*



*Emergency operating
room at the Casa de
Salud Valdecilla,
in 1929.*

2. The lazaretto of Pedrosa (1826–1904)

Maritime health in the port of Santander

A long time ago,
some diseases spread very quickly.

That is why
governments created special places
called lazarettos.

They were used to monitor ships
arriving from other countries,
to stop diseases from spreading.

Ships had to quarantine:
they waited a few days before entering the port.
Passengers, sailors, and goods were checked.
There were two kinds of lazarettos:
observation ones and general ones.

In 1826,
the government chose the island of Pedrosa,
in the Bay of Santander,
to build a lazaretto.
It was in a good location,
far from towns and easy to reach by sea.

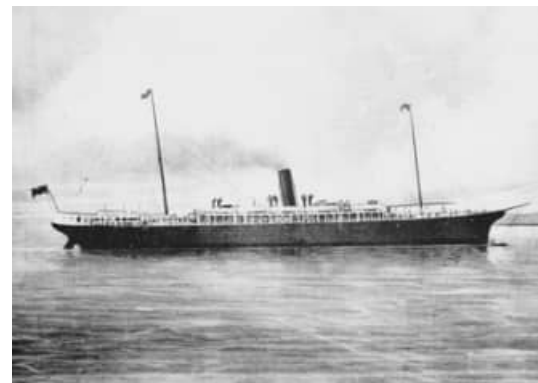
One year later,
they bought the land
and began to build the facilities.

From 1828,
it was used as a place for health checks,
to protect the population.

This was the beginning
of Pedrosa's link
to public health.



*The port of Santander,
around the year 1892.*



*The steamship
Alfonso XIII,
around the year
1911–1912.*

A healthcare centre that protected public health

During the 19th century, the island of Pedrosa was used to control diseases arriving by sea. Ships that might carry infection had to wait there before entering the port of Santander.

Over time, people realised that the space was too small and needed improvements.

In 1870, the government officially approved the “dirty” lazaretto on Pedrosa. This allowed the island to receive ships with serious diseases.

The island witnessed some important events.

In 1893, one of the ships in quarantine, the Cabo Machichaco, exploded and caused a terrible tragedy.

In 1898, many sick soldiers also arrived here, after the wars in Cuba and the Philippines.

Although there were rumours of closure, the lazaretto remained active until 1904.

After that, the service gradually came to an end, and the equipment was sent to another lazaretto in Vigo.



*Drawing of the
Pedrosa lazaretto,
year 1898.*



*The Cabo Machichaco
before the explosion,
in 1893.*

Architecture and landscape for quarantine

In 1870, the lazaretto on Pedrosa island was officially recognised. It already had some useful buildings, and others were being built. There was a hospital, warehouses, a guesthouse for 200 people, and housing for the workers.

Over the following years, many improvements were made: a simple chapel, a cistern, paths, fountains, and gardens.

But there were also complaints about the poor condition of the place. People called for real improvements, rather than just small fixes.

In the 1890s, the buildings were painted, pipes, walkways and fountains were repaired, and the guesthouse and doctor's house were decorated.

Shortly before 1898, water arrived from Pontejos.

The island featured trees, plants, and pleasant paths. Next to the chapel was the cemetery, where the deceased were buried and funerals held.



Pedrosa island, in the year 1898.



The hospital of the Pedrosa lazaretto, in the year 1898.

Guardians against infection

Many people worked at the Pedrosa lazaretto. The Ministry of the Interior was in charge of managing the staff.

Over time, especially from 1870 onwards, the number of workers increased. There were directors, doctors, orderlies, nurses, guards, caretakers and others.

They all lived on the island during the quarantine period. They could not leave until 20 days after the last case.

There were also customs officers to maintain public order.

A boat dropped off and collected everything needed on the island.

People who stayed at the lazaretto had to pay for the quarantine service and care received.

Some services were contracted through public auctions. The winning companies managed the lodging, kitchen, lighting, as well as washing, laundry and ironing.



The Pedrosa lazaretto from the north, in the year 1898.



Pedrosa island from the south, around the year 1912.

3. The National Maritime Sanatorium of Pedrosa (1908–1930)

The fight against childhood tuberculosis

At the beginning of the 20th century, tuberculosis was a very serious disease. It affected many people, especially poor children. There was no effective cure, so doctors focused on prevention.

The State created centres to care for the youngest: places with fresh air, good food, and lots of rest.

This is how the maritime sanatoriums began, such as the one in Oza (La Coruña) and the one in Pedrosa (Cantabria).

They treated weak children or those with mild symptoms. Very sick children were admitted later, in special buildings for them.

The local councils organised the trips in groups. The State covered the cost of the centre. Sanatoriums opened from April to November and welcomed up to 25 children per province.

These places aimed to improve health and stop the disease from progressing. Caring for children meant caring for the future of the whole country.



The Oza National Maritime Sanatorium, around the year 1910.



The National Maritime Sanatorium of Pedrosa, around the 1920s.

Pedrosa island: a place of healing

In 1910,
the National Maritime Sanatorium of Pedrosa
was created.

It was a centre to care for
children with tuberculosis.

The chosen location was
the old quarantine island.

The doctor Mariano Morales Rillo
was its first director.

In the summer of 1910,
the first 119 patients arrived.

Over the years,
the sanatorium grew larger
and began to care for
more seriously ill children too.

People could visit the centre
and see how the children lived.

It also helped
during emergencies.
During a flu epidemic,
it welcomed orphans.
In 1921,
it cared for sick soldiers
returning from war.

From 1918,
it offered free medical check-ups to local families.

The sanatorium was an important place
to care for health and to help
those most in need.



*Some children resting,
in the year 1918.*



*A sick soldier,
in the year 1922.*

The pavilions of the island of children

In 1909,
work began to turn Pedrosa island
into a children's sanatorium for tuberculosis.

At first,
there were only four old buildings
and the island could only be reached by sailboat.
The first spaces were fixed:
a hospital, an inn, a dining hall and a clinic.

Over the years,
new pavilions were built
with natural light, fresh air and gardens.
In 1916,
the Victoria Eugenia pavilion was opened.
Later,
the Infanta Beatriz and María Luisa Pelayo pavilions
were added.

The island filled with
houses for doctors, a chapel, a theatre,
and areas for walking, sport and rest.

There were paths, fountains, ponds, swimming pools,
and even a forest school.

Pedrosa became
a special place for healing.
A place where architecture, nature and health
came together
to care for children.



*Queen Victoria Eugenia
pavilion,
around the 1920s.*



*María Luisa pavilion,
around the 1920s.*

The hands that cared

The first director of the sanatorium was Doctor Mariano Morales Rillo. He was a modern, kind doctor who believed that education could help people heal. He created a cheerful place, with games, lessons, and outdoor walks.

Although he had many good ideas, the centre often lacked money. In 1924, the director left his post and was replaced by Buenaventura Muñoz. From that moment on, the Daughters of Charity also helped.

The sanatorium worked thanks to doctors, teachers and other staff. Teachers lived with the children and taught them outside.

There were also nurses, gardeners, cooks, electricians and carpenters. They all prepared the island before the patients arrived.

Children had a health check-up, got washed, and received care, food and exercise based on their needs.

The sanatorium was a place of learning, health, and inspiration for many people who wanted to care better for sick children.



Director Mariano Morales Rillo and Queen Victoria Eugenia, around the 1920s.



The garden, around the 1920s.

4. The National Maritime Sanatorium of Pedrosa (1931–2025)

Pedrosa island changes its use

During the Second Spanish Republic (1931–1939), the Pedrosa sanatorium changed a lot. It stopped being just for the summer and began operating all year round. It mainly treated people with bone tuberculosis.

During the Civil War (1936–1939), the island also welcomed wounded soldiers. Services were reorganised to care for more patients.

Over time, the sanatorium also began treating adults. It became a surgical and rehabilitation centre. The most common operations were on the spine and hip.

In 1951, it was named a centre against disability for northern Spain.

In the 1960s, it was called the Víctor Meana Sanatorium.

In the 1970s, it was a modern centre. It helped many patients with bone problems, thanks to support from the State and other institutions.



Report on the National Maritime Sanatorium of Pedrosa, in the year 1934.



Rehabilitation equipment, used in the 1970s.

The transformation of the old sanatorium

During the 20th century, the Pedrosa sanatorium kept much of its old appearance. Small renovations were made to adapt it to new times, but there were no major changes.

In 1949, a chapel was built and the kitchen, paths and water system were improved. New medical equipment, like X-ray machines, was purchased.

In the 1950s and 60s, rehabilitation rooms were added and a workshop was created to make orthopaedic devices.

In 1962, a monument was unveiled in honour of Doctor Víctor Meana, who had been director of the centre for many years.

Although the place still looked beautiful on the outside, inside there was damp, cracks and old furniture.

Despite this, the sanatorium continued to operate and helped many ill people in a peaceful and natural environment.



The Infanta Beatriz pavilion, around the year 1950.



Aerial view, in the year 1956.

The staff and their daily work

Between 1931 and 1980,
a wide range of people worked
on the island of Pedrosa.
There were doctors, nurses,
orderlies, teachers,
cooks, technicians,
and also Daughters of Charity.
They all helped
to care for the patients.

Each day was well organised:
breakfast, check-ups, walks,
games, lessons, rest,
and visits from families.
There were also celebrations,
like the arrival of the Three Kings with presents.

Some doctors,
such as Víctor Meana and Rafael Colvee,
were very important for the centre.

The sanatorium treated many patients,
sometimes more than 400.
Sometimes there were not enough staff.
But those who worked there
did so with dedication and care.

The centre was free or low-cost,
thanks to support from the State.

Life in Pedrosa
was an example of teamwork,
serving the health and well-being
of people who were ill.



*Report on
the National Maritime
Sanatorium of Pedrosa,
in the year 1934.*



*The Queen Victoria
Eugenia pavilion,
around the year 1950.*

A new chapter for the island of Pedrosa

In the 1980s,
the island of Pedrosa needed many repairs.
The Government promised to build new buildings,
but the project was delayed
and was not completed as expected.

Little by little,
the number of patients decreased,
and in 1987,
they were transferred to the hospital in Lencres.

Since then,
Pedrosa has no longer been a hospital
and began a new chapter.

Now,
the island is managed
by the Cantabrian Foundation
for Health and Social Well-being.
It supports people
with mental health issues,
addictions, or other difficulties.

There are support programmes for families,
home care services,
and social inclusion activities.

In 2002,
the first Dual Pathology Unit in Spain was created.

Today,
Pedrosa continues to be
a place of care,
meant to protect and support
those who need it most.



*Aerial view,
in the year 2023.*



*The Infanta Beatriz pavilion,
in the year 2024.*

5. The faces of Pedrosa

The visitors

Since the late 19th century, the island of Pedrosa has welcomed many important visitors. Kings, doctors, artists and politicians walked through its gardens and buildings.

For many years, the royal family visited the island every summer.

Writers such as Gerardo Diego and José Bergamín, musicians like Juan Manén and actors like Enrique Borrás also spent time there.

Pedrosa was more than a health centre. It was also a place for art, music and poetry.

Photographers, painters and filmmakers wanted to capture its beauty. Poets such as Concha Espina and Andrés Bello wrote about it.

There were concerts, theatre plays and even circus shows on the island.

Pedrosa was, then, a place of care... and also a place full of life and culture.



Visit of King Alfonso XIII and Queen Victoria Eugenia, in the year 1916.



Enrique Borrás visiting the children, in the year 1919.

The protectors

Many people helped make Pedrosa island a better place. Some donated money, others gave land, or even toys and medicine for the children.

Kings Alfonso XIII and Victoria Eugenia sent gifts and plants for the garden.

The people of Ponteijos donated land where open-air schools were built.

Luis de la Pezuela gave money to build the Infanta Beatriz pavilion.

The Marchioness of Pelayo paid for another building, and later the Marchioness of Nájera did the same.

José Mac Lennan helped bring drinking water to the island, a great change for everyone.

Thanks to these people, Pedrosa island stopped being an isolated place and became a symbol of solidarity.

Their names still live on in the gardens, schools and pavilions they helped to build.



The island's garden, around the 1920s.



The inauguration of the María Luisa pavilion, in the year 1926.

The professionals

Pedrosa island was also an example of good architecture.

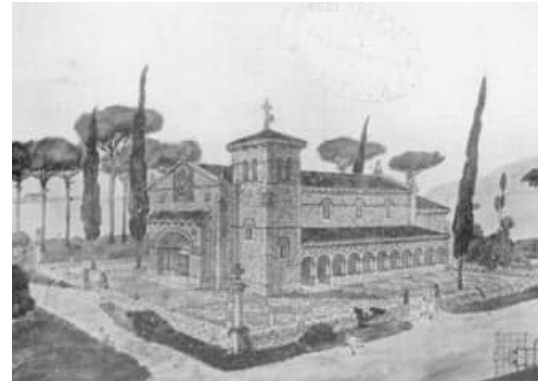
Several architects helped to transform the island into a beautiful, healthy and practical place.

One of them was Ricardo García Guereta, who designed the Infanta Beatriz pavilion. Others included Leonardo Rucabado, who created the chapel and pantheon, and Gonzalo Bringas, who built the María Luisa Pelayo pavilion.

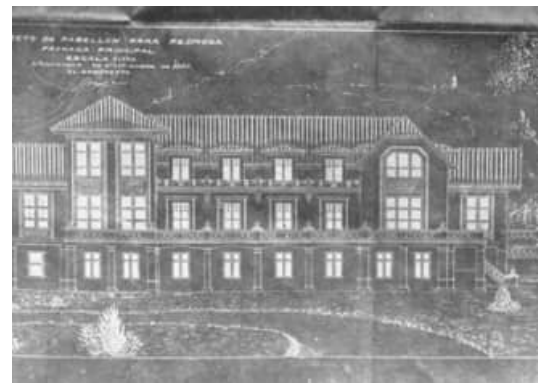
Each building had lots of natural light, good ventilation, and was designed to help care for the patients. There were different styles: art déco, neo-Mudejar and regionalist, but all aimed to create a pleasant environment.

Engineers and builders also helped by providing water, improving paths, and building gardens, schools and pavilions.

Thanks to the teamwork of many people, Pedrosa island became a place where architecture, health and nature worked together.



The chapel-pantheon project, in the year 1917.



The María Luisa Pelayo pavilion project, in the year 1926.

The artists

On the island of Pedrosa,
art played a role in care.
Alongside doctors,
the beauty of the surroundings was also important.

In 1916,
several painters decorated the inside
of the Queen Victoria Eugenia pavilion with murals.
They painted dining rooms, classrooms
and bathrooms
to make them more beautiful and pleasant.

In 1920,
a sculpture was inaugurated
in honour of Doctor Manuel Martín Salazar.
And in 1962,
another was dedicated to Director Víctor Meana.

The artist Daniel Zuloaga
made ceramic tiles for the theatre
and for the Queen Victoria Eugenia pavilion.

In addition, the gardens,
with trees, flowers and walking paths,
were an important part of the treatment.

All this was more than decoration:
it aimed to create a place
where air, light, colour and calm
could help people heal.
At Pedrosa,
art was also a kind of medicine.



*One of the study
classrooms,
around the 1920s.*



*The monument to Doctor
Manuel Martín Salazar,
in the year 1924.*

6. The island of Pedrosa through time

1826.

The island of Pedrosa becomes a lazaretto, a place for quarantine to prevent contagion.

1854.

Several lazarettos in Spain close, including the one on Pedrosa.

1893.

A ship carrying dynamite explodes near the island after being held in quarantine.

1909.

Improvement works for the lazaretto are approved.

1910.

The first children arrive at the new sanatorium.

1916.

The Victoria Eugenia pavilion is inaugurated.

1920.

The foundation stone of the Infanta Beatriz pavilion is laid.

1925.

The Infanta Beatriz pavilion is inaugurated.

1926.

The María Luisa Pelayo pavilion opens.

1928.

Construction begins on the chapel-pantheon.



*At rest,
during the 1920s.*



*In the garden,
during the 1920s.*

1932.

A new, more modern medical phase begins.

1937.

Patients create a magazine called Health and Culture.

1949.

The chapel dedicated to Our Lady of Mount Carmel is inaugurated.

1959.

Dr Víctor Meana, a much-loved director of the sanatorium, passes away.

1962.

A monument is unveiled in honour of Doctor Víctor Meana.

1987.

Patients begin to be transferred to the hospital in Liencres.

1999.

The Cantabrian Foundation for Health and Social Well-being is established.

2006.

The Infanta Beatriz pavilion becomes a centre for people with addictions.

2024.

An employment workshop begins in the former lazaretto inn.



*Gym class,
in the 1920s.*



*The playground,
in the 1920s.*

Did you know...?

An important discovery

In 1882, the German doctor Robert Koch discovered the microbe that causes tuberculosis.

A vaccine to protect

In 1921, the BCG vaccine was tested on people for the first time. It was a big step in preventing the disease.

A new treatment for tuberculosis

In 1944, streptomycin began to be used. It was the first antibiotic that worked against this disease.



Bathing in the pool, in the 1920s.



Bathing at the beach, in the 1920s.

7. The theatre

The writer and journalist Joaquín Dicenta visited Pedrosa island in 1911.

He wrote that,
as he arrived by sea,
he saw two small buildings
next to a wooden jetty.

These buildings were used
as a gatehouse and a storehouse.
They were the first thing visitors saw.

In 1910,
when the first children arrived at the sanatorium,
people thought that the old storehouse
could be used for something else.

In 1912,
it became a small theatre.

Shortly afterwards, in 1913,
a cinema, a piano and a gramophone were added
so the children could watch films
and enjoy music.

That is how the story began
of the old theatre on Pedrosa island.



*Entrance to Pedrosa island
by sea,
in the year 1911.*



*Sick children
welcoming visitors,
in the 1920s.*

The theatre on Pedrosa island was a very special place.

In the 1920s, sick children performed plays to entertain their friends.

It was also used as a venue for shows to raise money for the sanatorium.

In 1920, the architect Ricardo García Guereta asked the artist Daniel Zuloaga to decorate the building with colourful tiles.

In 1921, soldiers who were ill after the war in Africa were welcomed in the theatre.

Over time, the building was abandoned.

But in 2023, it was restored and can now be visited in good condition.



Arrival of Queen Victoria Eugenia, during her visit in the summer of 1922.



Current state of the theatre, in May 2025.

Would you like to know more?

We recommend
reading
one of the following books:

GIL AGUIRRE, Elena:
Monumental catalogue of the municipality of Marina de Cudeyo,
Santander, 1997.

NAVARRO Y GARCÍA, Ramón:
History of healthcare in Spain,
Barcelona, 2002.

REVUELTA PÉREZ, Ángel y
SETIÉN EXPÓSITO, Adrián:
Contemporary History of Marina de Cudeyo, 3 volumes,
Marina de Cudeyo, 2001.

VÁZQUEZ GONZÁLEZ-QUEVEDO, Francisco:
Medicine in Cantabria,
Santander, 1982.

VÁZQUEZ DE QUEVEDO, Francisco:
The lazaretto of the island of Pedrosa: 190 years of healthcare service,
Santander, 2019.

Who took part in this exhibition?

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Exhibition and graphic design:

Elisa Carreño Arenal.

Documentation and scientific advisory:

Sara del Hoyo Maza.

Visitor information

Where is the exhibition?

In the old theatre on the island of Pedrosa,
in the town of Pontejos,
municipality of Marina de Cudeyo (Cantabria).

Free admission.

You can enter for free.
You only need to wait a little
if there are too many people inside.

Do you need help or more information?

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