SEPTEMBER 1977

THE BULLETIN
OF THE
ROYAL COLLEGE OF PSYCHIATRISTS

COLLEGE NEWS

ANNUAL MEETINGS RECALLED

1. Twenty-five Years Ago

In this Jubilee year it seems appropriate first to recall the RMPA Annual Meeting of 1952. At that time the total membership of the Association was 1,242, and its annual income and expenditure were in the region of £6,000.

The Meeting was held in Northampton, mainly at St Andrew's Hospital, but with sessions also at St Crispin Hospital and, for the Presidential Address, at the Guildhall. The incoming President was Dr Thomas Tennent, the Physician-Superintendent of St Andrew's, and he took over from Dr P. K. McCowan of the Crichton Royal, Dumfries. It is a pleasure to be able to mention that Dr McCowan, previously of Whitchurch Hospital, Cardiff, and at one time a senior colleague of mine at Cane Hill, is still happily with us, and he and Dr K. K. Drury are our oldest surviving Past Presidents.

Dr Tennent had come from Gartnavel Royal Hospital to the Maudsley in the late '20s and had been Deputy to Professor Mapother before going on to St Andrew's. He had been Treasurer of the RMPA for some years before becoming President, and he continued as Treasurer until his untimely death in 1962.

Readers, especially those who enjoyed the hospitality of St Andrew's at last year's May Meeting, will know that the present Medical Director is Dr Gavin Tennent. I believe that this is a unique instance of a son succeeding his father in such a position, albeit after an interval.

St Andrew's, founded in 1832, has always been an independent institution—for long a 'Registered Hospital', and is one of the very few that have retained their independence since the inception of the NHS.

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https://doi.org/10.1192/S000712507730118X Published online by Cambridge University Press

However, in its early years it was often loosely referred to as the 'Northampton County Asylum' (in the absence of any other), and so the poems written in the hospital by its best-known patient, John Clare, especially the celebrated *I Am*, often appear in anthologies under that heading.

Dr Tennent had taken a deep interest in the personality and psychiatric disorder of John Clare, and, as it happens, the early '50s were the years of a general revived appreciation of Clare's poetry. Hence he chose for his Address the title 'Reflections on Genius', and in it made special reference to Clare's works and their relation to the circumstances of his life and his recurrent episodes of mental illness.

As Treasurer, Dr Tennent was continuing a tradition which for a good many years had linked St Andrew's with the work of the RMPA. His predecessor there, Dr Rambaut, had been the Association's Registrar and its President in 1934. As Registrar he was mainly concerned with the RMPA's examinations for mental and mental deficiency nurses. In his time and that of his successor, Dr Ivison Russell of Clifton Hospital, York, the examinations were run entirely from the Registrar's hospital, as the RMPA had no special staff for this part of its work. But the Association had now given up its nursing examinations, and at the 1952 Meeting the Registrar reported that the very last had been held. The Report recalled that since the inception of the examinations in 1891 over 50,000 candidates had qualified in mental nursing, and over 5,000 had qualified in mental deficiency nursing since the relevant examinations had started in 1919.

It was evident that the future task of the Registrar and the Education Committee would be concerned with the training of psychiatrists. The new Registrar was Dr William Sargant, and already the Association had instituted a DPM of its own under conditions more suitable for candidates from peripheral psychiatric hospitals than diplomas offered by other bodies. This venture appeared to be flourishing, and it was only discontinued later when the English Conjoint Board modified its conditions. It was also suggested at the Meeting that a set of didactic lectures should be instituted, partly financed by the Maudsley Bequest, and lectures or seminars designed for junior members became a feature of the Quarterly Meetings.

The other Officers of the Association were Dr R. W. Armstrong of Littlemore Hospital as General Secretary, Dr G. W. T. H. Fleming as Editor and to be President in the following year, and myself as Librarian.

In the Council's Report mention was made of the evidence to be presented to the Royal Commission on Marriage and Divorce then in session. This was an exercise in which I was personally involved, and in which unexpected complications arose. A joint committee of the BMA and the RMPA had been set up to prepare a memorandum of evidence which it was hoped would represent the views of the medical profession as a whole. On this committee there were three psychiatrists—Dr Eliot Slater, Dr Jack Hobson (whose recent death at a comparatively early age is deeply deplored) and myself, and after discussion Dr Hobson and I drafted the memorandum, he dealing with nullity suits and I with divorce. But at a late stage in the proceedings we were urged by some members to add recommendations for a general liberalizing of the divorce laws, including, for example, divorce at the request of either party after a period of separation.

This proved fatal as far as the BMA was concerned, for at the Annual Representative Meeting these added recommendations were vigorously opposed, the whole memorandum was thrown out, and the BMA found itself in the undignified position of not being able to submit any evidence at all.

In these circumstances I asked Council to allow the original memorandum, confined to the psychiatric aspects of the Commission's terms of reference, to go forward on behalf of the RMPA alone. So eventually Dr Hobson and I duly appeared before the Commission and submitted to the usual questioning. We were concerned with possible changes in the law rather than with the wider relations of psychiatry to marriage and the family, and one of the changes we were most anxious to see was in the law concerning 'divorce for incurable insanity'. We urged that the requirement of five years continuous residence in a mental hospital plus the label of 'incurable' was quite out of date, and we recommended instead that evidence should be adduced of five years continuous existence of mental disorder, with an unfavourable prognosis. However, the Commission did not accept any of this, and reform had to wait for another ten years or more, by which time the proposals which the BMA had rejected were found to be generally acceptable, and the problem of 'incurable insanity' was merged in the wider changes in divorce law.

At this same time our Parliamentary Committee and our Mental Deficiency Section were working on proposals for new mental health legislation. Both Northern Ireland and Eire had recently produced new Mental Health Acts, and it seemed that the time could not be far distant when England and Scotland would follow. Various proposals are to be found in memoranda preserved in our files, but the work done in those years had to be superseded when in 1953 the Royal Commission on Mental Health Law was set up.

https://doi.org/10.1192/S000712507730118X Published online by Cambridge University Press

In any case, none of these proposals were anything like as radical as the eventual recommendations of the Royal Commission.

Here we have a link between the present and the not-so-distant past, for mental health legislation is again under revision, and some think that the changes made in 1959–60 were not radical enough. But now I turn to a different kind of link.

As I write, the College is paying tribute to the services of Dr Edward Hare, after regretfully accepting his decision to retire from Editorship of our *Journal*. And at the Annual Meeting in 1952, Edward Hare, then of Barrow Hospital, Bristol, was presented with the Bronze Medal of the Association, awarded to him for an outstanding essay on 'The Ecology of Mental Disorder'.

Fortunately this essay was printed in our *Journal* (*J. ment. Sci.*, 1952, **98**, 579), and it repays careful reading. The subject is treated under the headings of *Culture* (different cultures and changing cultures); of *Migration*, including the influences of population pressure, isolation, and urban conditions; and of local and temporary factors. He concluded that in every environmental situation there was an underlying factor necessary for mental health, which might be called 'social communication', and that 'lack of the sense of security and worth which an individual must derive from a social group' was an important aetiological factor in modern conditions.

Dr Hare is one of the very few of our members who have won both the Gaskell Prize and the Bronze Medal, but in 1952 it was his hospital, Barrow, that scored a double, as the Gaskell was awarded to Dr Stanley Smith, then at that hospital and later Medical Superintendent of Lancaster Moor Hospital.

At this meeting Honorary Membership was, very belatedly, conferred on C. J. Jung. In the previous year, just as belatedly, Ernest Jones had been made an Honorary Member.

Only three papers, besides the Presidential Address are recorded as having been read at the meeting, but the two that were subsequently published represented the fruits of extensive study and reflection, and both were by members who have been prominent in our affairs.

The first was by Dr Morris Markowe, then at the MRC Unit for Research in Occupational Adaptation and now the College's Registrar, and was entitled 'Occupational Psychiatry: an Historical Survey and Some Recent Researches' (*J. ment. Sci.*, 1953, **99**, 92). Among his conclusions were 'that psychological disability is not synonymous with occupational disability' and that neurotics could give as good a performance as average unskilled workers. In this field, psychiatry was needed educationally as well as clinically.

Dr Eliot Slater's paper (*J. ment. Sci.*, 1953, **99**, 44) on 'Genetic Investigations on Twins' was a defence of the twin-study method and an account of the work done to date in his Department at the Institute of Psychiatry, anticipating the publication of the MRC Report on the subject.

There was also a discussion on 'The Psychiatric Training of Occupational Therapists'—appropriate since St Andrew's was noted for its School of Occupational Therapy, but actually opened by Dr Otho Fitzgerald of Shenley Hospital, who at the time was Secretary of our Education Committee.

Was there no whisper of the possible formation of a Royal College? None is recorded at this Annual Meeting, but in the previous year a discussion had been held at one of the Quarterly Meetings. This was never published in detail, but there is the following reference to it in the Council's Report: 'Careful and considered statements for and against the suggestion were given, but attendance was disappointing and could scarcely be regarded as representative. Council feel, however, that there is a strong body of opinion favouring the suggestion, and they will review it regularly in the light of changing or more favourable circumstances.' Our College Charter was granted just twenty years after this.

ALEXANDER WALK

https://doi.org/10.1192/S000712507730118X Published online by Cambridge University Press