



Mental Health: Lennox Castle

Evidence from the Archives

Howard Mitchell:

This was one of the first pieces of documentary evidence that I looked at when I came to the records here in Lennox Castle. It's a Lennox Castle Maternity Hospital Admissions Book, and we have on the twenty-fifth of June, 1955, Mitchell, male, born in the hospital, well actually it says – nature of illness – born in hospital. This is in actual fact my record of birth.

There is a great many different pieces of documentary evidence available to me. One of the most obvious was the patients' case notes, although in actual fact these case notes, which document the social background and the diagnosis and the admissions procedure pertaining to the patients as well as some very bizarre three-sided photographs, weren't in fact available to the nursing staff. These were kept separate by the medical fraternity and, as I say, weren't available at ward level at all, which made things rather difficult for many of the staff on the wards, that some problems of management with people who they didn't know why they had been admitted or from often criminal backgrounds.

I was in the fortunate position to have this document passed on to me by an ex-member of staff who worked in the nursing administration in Lennox Castle hospital. It's the old misconduct book for the male patients running from 1937 until the seventies and it charts each individual patient's record of misdeeds within the wards. For example, this particular patient, 1940, struck out at attendant when cautioned for smoking pipe at breakfast table. Resistive when put to bed; used threatening and obscene language; bread and milk diet as ordered by medical officer; threw cup through window; ordered in and given three drops of paraldehyde; threatened to blind staff with glass measure. We can see here what types of misdemeanours were punished, what the punishments tended to be.

I've got here the regulations regarding the visiting of patients and it illustrates quite well the very harsh regime that existed in the past. Visitors are positively prohibited from bringing matches, wine, beer or spirits into the institution or giving same to patients, but visitors may bring or send to their friends fruit, sweets or cakes and also newspapers and books, such should however be given to the nurse or attendant who will afterwards give them to the patient. Permission to give any other article than those mentioned must be obtained from the doctor.

There'd be a visitors' book in the ward, which would detail every person that came to visit a particular patient. Written down would be the relationship, whether it was a relation, a friend and the address of the person. Visiting was extremely rigidly regulated and as I say a record was kept of everybody who came to visit a patient. We can see here that this patient in particular was visited twice a week throughout that whole decade by his mother and father. It's just a list of dates, but in many ways it's quite poignant, the loyalty that some relatives showed to a boy here who I know was extremely multiply handicapped, and it's quite poignant that his parents came up to see him so regularly and often and we can contrast with some other of the entries here who were years between the visits from any relatives or friends.

A large part of the purpose of the institution was to keep the patients within the confines of the grounds and a large part of the working day of members of staff was to ensure that this happened. And there are many stories of how the patients escaped and how many of them attempted to escape. So we have a register here of the escapees dating back to 1930, the first escape, and we go to fourteen hundred escapes as a running total up to 1977. And we can see by detailing the modes of escapes, by breaking through a lavatory window, by breaking a window and sliding down a drainpipe, very many breakings of windows to get out and while out on ground patrol or while out working. I think it illustrates the task that some of

the members of staff had to in many ways try and enforce a prison regime in a situation which wasn't built as a prison at all. But members of staff were left in no question as to their duties and if a patient escaped from say a walking party or a working party then it was often a disciplinary interview and a dressing down by the chief male nurse and the physician superintendent if one allowed a patient to escape.