



Mental Health: Lennox Castle

Nurse's perspective: Colin

Howard

What would your wages be when you first started?

Colin

After you paid your board money you get twenty-three and eleven pence and then if you were satisfactory after six months you were real medical and became superannuated and they took one and tuppence off you and you'd only twenty-two and ninepence.

Howard

So you had less money after six months?

Colin

Yeah,

Howard

Hmm, and you say you had to pay board. How much would you be paying on board?

Colin

It was equivalent to twenty-six shillings.

Howard

Hmm, more than half your wages. Hmm, and did you feel that was good value?

Colin

No it wasn't good value at all. To me it was very very poor. They never showed any imagination about your menu. I mean you I can remember, I mean and we're talking about 1937, I tell you the breakfast, you just looked up, waked up in the morning, and said it's Monday, it's an egg, Tuesday was ham, Wednesday was a kipper,, Thursday it was a sausage, Friday it was an egg. Every day, never a change.

Howard

And where did you go to get that?

Colin

The place was up in the refectory, in the middle of the male refectory. There was a sitting room there and a dining room.

Howard

You said that you were allowed a dance once a week...

Colin

...once a week

Howard

Were there strictures in that?

Colin

Well you couldn't go up the road with them, you know what I mean

Howard

Hmm, but you were allowed freedom to dance I suppose.

Colin

Oh yeah, under the supervisions of the superintendent and his wife, the matron and the chief male nurse.

Howard

So you could do whatever you liked. But you weren't allowed to go beyond a certain place in the hospital

Colin

That's right, aha. The tea room. The tea room. If you were caught with a nurse in the tea room that was as far as you and that was the finish of it

Howard

Hmm, the tea room would be where?

Colin

In the middle of the hall, up from the hospital site.

Howard

But um, was somebody watching them?

Colin

Aye, a man on the telephones, part of his job was walking about at the witching hour, eleven o'clock

Howard

No bribes come his way?

Colin

No

Howard

But presumably quite a few romances between the nurses.

Colin

Oh aye there were quite a lot oh aye, I mean most of the staff who stayed in the hall were married to nurses

Howard

And yourself?

Colin

No, Dennis Curran and I broke the mould.

Howard

Right

Colin

We married local girls

Howard

How did you, did you meet your wife?

Colin

At the Kirkintilloch dances.

Howard

Right, and did she never work in the castle?

Colin

She worked after we were married, after we were married, and a couple of boys. She worked up there for twenty-eight years.

Howard

Hmm, in nursing?

Colin

Nursing aye.

Howard

What about the nurses, the male nurses, their relationships with the doctors? Did they have anything to do with them socially at all

Colin

No nothing at all. Frowned on, you know. I used to play tennis with one of the doctors, and that's when he said 'I'd like to go for a drink with you' but there would be hell to pay before I got down!

Howard

And would that be very uncommon?

Colin

I'm talking about before the war. Latterly it was completely changed.

Howard

Why do you think that was, being frowned on?

Colin

Dr Chislett for example, he was the big shot you know and he, aye he looked at the place as his estate. I mean he was very very strict and very fair he thought, but when I think back on it. He heard there was a male nurse started who was a landscape gardener, so right away he got him to do his garden, and eight to five and two patients, I mean, and that was all for free, and his wife used to go into the walled garden, walk in with her oval basket and cut all the flowers and everything else she wanted. You thought it was, belonged to them. I mean, God Almighty.

Howard

Er did you see much of him about the grounds?

Colin

No, no, sometimes, it depended on the odd visit but he drove through in an old Armstrong Sidley and you had to salute him. He saluted you back but if you didn't salute him you were reported to the chief male nurse and told in future salute him.

Colin

There was no such thing as a domestic, a paid domestic. Patients cleaned everything.

Howard

What was it kind of regime for them, was it fairly hard would you say?

Colin

No, they seemed to, they seemed to accept the fact that this was their job you know, what they had to do in the ward for example it was their job. Sometimes you could say – if you don't do it right I'll put somebody else on – that was enough for them they wanted to keep their job, but I never saw any you know remuneration. I thought it was a disgrace. They used to get ten woodbine

Howard

Per?

Colin

Per person, per week

Howard

Aha

Colin

Four pence. They that worked in the shop they get double.

Howard

What happened if they didn't smoke?

Colin

Aye, I never thought of that. There was no alternative. I think they sold them.

Howard

But presumably most of them would smoke.

Colin

Aye, nearly everyone of them

Howard

And was there an extra ration of cigarettes on top of that or?

Colin

No

Howard

No, that would be...

Colin

Cigarettes or pipe tobacco, one or the other.

Howard

Hmm

Colin

The patients do all the work. There's no, there's no domestic staff whatever, and it was a good thing in a way because it gave the patients something to do, but after, well I can't tell you the date, I think it was in the sixties, they started domestic staff and well; what did the patients do? Sat about; they'd nothing to do, which was...

Howard

That caused problems then?

Colin

Ah, aye it caused problems. You know what they say – idle hands...

Howard

Hmm

Colin

..but to me it was silly to change it completely. I argued with them up there, argued that they should pay the staff, pay the patients half the normal wage that they'd employed somebody from outside. Give them half of it and I said you're getting away with a bargain even then because they'll do more work than the normal person would do. And I said the same for all the boys that worked in the vans and everything else, they should get a reasonable, a reasonable wage. And they did eventually after nationalisation, they got ten shillings some of them you know, maybe five shillings, but that was all.

Howard

Was there any sort of real abuses that you saw in your time there?

Colin

You mean patients being abused physically, hard?

Howard

Whatever aye.

Colin

Oh I've seen them being struck but it was only in self-defence. I mean you're dealing with patients, normal big fellows you know

Howard

Hmm, I never saw anyone taken badly, really, because to begin with the doctors came round everyday and would see marks on them like that, they would have spoke to the doctor, you know.

Howard

What about patients fighting amongst themselves?

Colin

Aye well, that happened.

Howard

Could that be utilised?

Colin

Oh yes aye, sometimes they have to go and it was the only way you'd get peace.

I mean, when I was up there, there was no such thing as a drugs as they used latterly. When a patient took an outburst it was a case of taking them down and putting them into bed but latterly it was drugs did it all for you. You just gave them some drugs and they were, they were quiet.

Howard

Hmm. Do you think it was better when there wasn't any?

Colin

No, no I think it was better for the patients. I mean they, they were quiet and docile but it saved them getting into any trouble too you know, fighting other ones.

Colin

Sometimes they'd be about a fracas with them, some of them fighting with one another and sometimes fighting with the staff you know it was. It's like everything else if you get eighty two all together all the time they must fall out.

Howard

So what sanctions would you be able to take?

Colin

Eh, the whole thing was always to send for more staff. Where they got them nobody actually told us

Howard

Hmm, and so did you actually have to end up fighting?

Colin

Fighting, oh yeah, struggle with them, putting them into bed. That was it putting them into bed and then they were on punishment for after that, miss their Woodbines, get bare rations. And

if when the, if they ran away and came back, and brought back they put them into a white moleskin suit and they kept that on for maybe three months. That was to try and make sure they didn't run away again, try and make sure.

Howard

And did they have a name for that regime?

Colin

Only the name they ever had was five o'clock treatment. When they went out of the wards and they came in at five o'clock they went to bed.

Howard

And were they put on a diet at all?

Colin

In the beginning they were put on a diet, bread, bread and tea. They were only going to make a mess with the porridge.

Howard

And was it something that worked at all?

Colin

I don't think it worked at all. I mean if they wanted to run away they'd run away. I mean they'd enough intelligence and they knew fine that I'm not staying in here.

Colin

I mean there were mental defects but I mean they were, the way they were looked after and treated you'd think they were convicts really you know. I felt sorry for most of them you know, especially you know the low grades. You know it's amazing how the high grade patients looked after the low grades and dressed them and fed them and everything else and I mean you know they could do that the one day, the next day they would fight with you, you know they were good with them but the low grades that couldn't do much for themselves.

Howard

Hmm, was that a feature on most wards?

Colin

Yeah, Hmm, The staff could never have done it, you know could never have fed them all.

Howard

You didn't feel it was appropriate for some of the patients that were in there originally to be in Lennox castle?

Colin

You mean the ones that were high grade?

Howard

Aha

Colin

Aye, I mean, I don't think they'd have been in there if it hadn't been for their criminal record and it was one way of putting them away inside.

Howard

But do you, do you think it's feasible for some or even the majority of mentally handicapped people to live outside?

Colin

Well I would say, I would say half of them could maybe make ends meet, but it's difficult because they're living in an institution where everything is laid out for them, foodwise. I mean they didn't cook or anything like that, so it's starting over again with them.

Colin

And after they were in there a number of years it's just routine.

Of course I had seventeen, seventeen years with juvenile delinquents you know, I had seventeen years with them and I thoroughly enjoyed every bit of that.

Howard

Were they very different to work with?

Colin

Oh aye, a lot of them, a lot of them should never have been in there. In fact, one of the doctors, she got four of them taken off the list.

Howard

We were talking to James Lappin this morning. Do you remember him coming in to the castle?

Colin

Hmm, I remember him coming from Glasgow in 1938.

Howard

What kind of guy was he?

Colin

Just the same as he is now. The very same, very same.

Howard

How would you describe him?

Colin

Oh I would describe him. I'm in a ward full of patients like Jimmy Lappin...

Howard

Hmm

Colin

...no bother at all, nice worker and everything. Just, it's a shame he was six when they sent him up there.

Howard

Do you think the likes of Jimmy could be...?

Colin

Jimmy could have been out years ago.

Howard

Did you, there was never any problems with him at all?

Colin

No, no, no.

Howard

Why do you think he ended up in there for seventy years, well in the hospital system.

Colin

A lot of them had no parents, well quite a number of them had no parents and sometimes the parents never bothered visiting them. They usually get visitors at Christmas and that and then they'd not see them for a year you know.

Howard

Looking back over your own career and a life involved in the castle how do you feel it's been a good life for you.

Colin

Oh aye, I enjoyed it.

Howard

If you could have changed anything at the time, what would you have changed?

Colin

I think I'd have given them more freedom, you know.

Howard

Have you any regrets at all?

Colin

No not really no. I reckon I'd, I reckon I'd enjoyed my life up there.