



## **Mental Health: Lennox Castle**

### *The Hospital Community*

But my sort of first impressions are probably based around the enormous range of abilities, that people had. And I don't think I had any concept of what mental handicap as it was called then, learning disabilities, was until several months after I worked in the hospital.

I started in the hospital block and we had a range of people from, a Glasgow fly-boy in particular who lived in the hospital and went and stayed some weekends with relatives. Pinched what he could down the shops and the barrows, and come back in and try to sell you it.

I could do with that..

He was a resident in the same ward that quite a number of people who were quadriplegic, blind and perhaps deaf.

And very small.

And weighed about three stone, who needed absolutely total nursing care. Another guy in the same place, would go and work in the farm during the day, and come back in and sleep there at night. The guy next to the small person with severe disabilities, was a soldier in the first world war, who had the Spanish flu in 1918 and cephalitis of some sort. And he ended up in the Castle for a long number of years.

There was a raft of people who had that flu and were left with some respiral condition. There was a raft of people. There was also a raft specifically of ladies. I only discovered the ladies of the hospital when I returned as a Charge Nurse and took charge of a female ward. They were there on the basis of being defined as moral defectives. And they had no more a learning disability that you or I. and they were.. by the time I was working there, they were old ladies. And they were lovely old ladies. But they did not have a learning disability.

There was a bizarre range of abilities and characters and experience. That was alluring in many ways. Coupled I think with the maternalism of quite a lot of the women nursing assistants I worked with. It was not an extended family that you would ever want to acknowledge. But so many people that I know, 'you're Margaret Mitchell's.. I remember your granny. Your granny was like that'. And suddenly there were all these people who knew you. Knew your relatives and knew who you were. And there was no place at all that you went in hospital, that somebody didn't know of you.

Actually, I think, I suspect that's pretty the same in any small community. And arguably the hospital was a small community of it's own. And I think you and I probably learned very quickly, in a small village like Lennox town, is that you don't say anything about anybody, because as sure as eggs are eggs you'll be talking to somebody's cousin.

I think you did develop particular fondness for individuals. I tell the story, and actually I tell it as a nauseam, and I still tell it. About a young man who was around, Peter passed away a few years ago, was a wee red-haired mop guy with Down Syndrome. Peter had very limited verbal communications. He could swear very well, but he was quite business like, but also he was quite comedic. Unfortunately, he had a bit of a temper, and I think many of the other patients in the ward would purchase upon that. Because it was probably slightly more entertaining than the black and white television that was sitting in the corner. Later on, in my profession life I met him again, and had the privilege of knowing him once he'd left hospital and once he was living back near his family. And he was a delightful man. I could name lots

and lots of names, but I do think, I think so many of the folk who left Lennox Castle were incredibly resilient individuals, and had a far greater strength of character than we often gave folk credit for. And also were highly intelligent and talented, but in different ways to you and I. I don't know if you remember a gentleman called George, I can't remember George's second name. But George lived in one of the wards, and it happened to be a ward that had a piano in the day all. And George was described to me initially as a 'Low Grade'. That was the terminology that was used, which meant that somebody who we would describe now as having a very complex learning disability. But George had a savant as well, and he in fact had more than one savant, he had a considerable number of savants, so you could give George seven numbers and then you could give him another seven numbers, and he would give you back fourteen numbers, which was the multiple thereof. Also, if you played a tune on the radio, if the radio was on, or the television was on. George could go up to the piano and he could pick up the tune, and he could pick it up absolute pitch perfect. And he just, goodness, that's what's going on. And yet this was a man who lived most of his life in an moleskin suit. You will remember them Mitch. He was a man who was deemed as having to be fed. Why? I never knew. And he was clearly had talents which belied that in entirety. And certainly my thinking was if this was my brother or sister, would I want them to be managed in such a way.