

*Care and Treatment of the Mentally Ill
in North Wales, 1800–2000*

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PAMELA MICHAEL



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Preface

This book is the fruit of research carried out initially (1993–6) in the School of History and Welsh History in the University of Wales Bangor, with financial support from the Wellcome Trust (Grant no. 038862). I wish to acknowledge the Trust's financial investment in this project, along with the opportunity given to me to discuss substantive issues in the research of madness with other scholars in the field. I acknowledge the support and cooperation of Clwyd Health Authority and the Clwydian Health Trust for allowing me access to records and for their support of the project.

My sincere thanks to my colleagues in University of Wales, Bangor, to Professor R. Merfyn Jones, Dr William Griffith and Dr David Hirst. They devised the project and then gave me the freedom to pursue the research. I have gained immensely from their support and collaboration. They are, however, in no way responsible for the views expressed in this book, nor answerable for any of the deficiencies. My own personal approach will be obvious.

I do not believe that any researcher can be wholly objective, but that the closest we can get is to acknowledge our own involvement and subjectivity. As Liz Stanley and Sue Wise have pointed out 'the presence of the researcher's self' is central in all research.¹ Therefore a brief statement of my own engagement with this history is called for, in order that readers understand from the beginning my own involvement and place in this history.

I paid my first research visit to the 'Denbigh Hospital' on 12 November 1993. It was a cold, crisp morning, but bright. When I drove down Castle Hill and turned the corner, and caught my first solitary glimpse of the asylum, the picture before me almost caught my breath. The asylum faces east and, as the wintry sun rose over the hill, it was bathed in a deep golden light. The stonework of this Jacobean-style structure is naturally of a mellow amber, but the rays of sun amplified the contours, and made the vast solid walls of the structure, set in parkland tinged that morning with frost, somehow ethereal. At this moment was born an enduring fascination with the architecture of asylumdom.

I had visited the asylum once before, for the official ceremonial 'launch' of the project, but on that occasion the day was flat and colourless, and the building looked grim, and somehow more institutional. On this second occasion, my first visit as a lone researcher, I met the two duty charge nurses (as they then were), Clwyd Wynne and Gwynfor Jones. I could not have received a warmer or more courteous introduction to the hospital. I was taken in and given tea in the reception room, where patients were taken on arrival to go through the formal admission process. It was equipped with an examination couch, screens, a sink and a table well stocked with tea, coffee and biscuits. This undoubtedly coloured my first impressions of the hospital. I both identified with the newly arrived patient and felt reassured and set at ease by the softly spoken staff and the relaxed atmosphere. Clearly they were experts in judging the mood and psychological profile of each new patient, and I sensed that they were taking stock of me in the same way.

I soon discovered that they had a passionate interest in the story of the asylum. They had acquired a fund of expert knowledge, ran a history society within the hospital, and often gave talks and slide shows in the locality. They told me that they had been 'collecting a few things'.

This was a day of introductions, and Clwyd took me across to Gwynfryn, a pleasant Victorian house on the opposite side of the road, which was then being used as the Academic Unit, and introduced me to the secretary, Anne Hayes. The office was cosy, the window open and whilst we were there a squirrel came onto the window sill to eat the nuts that she placed on a little saucer. Anne too was fascinated by the history of the hospital, and had been typing up notes from the early case records of patients admitted to the asylum, some of which are used in this history.

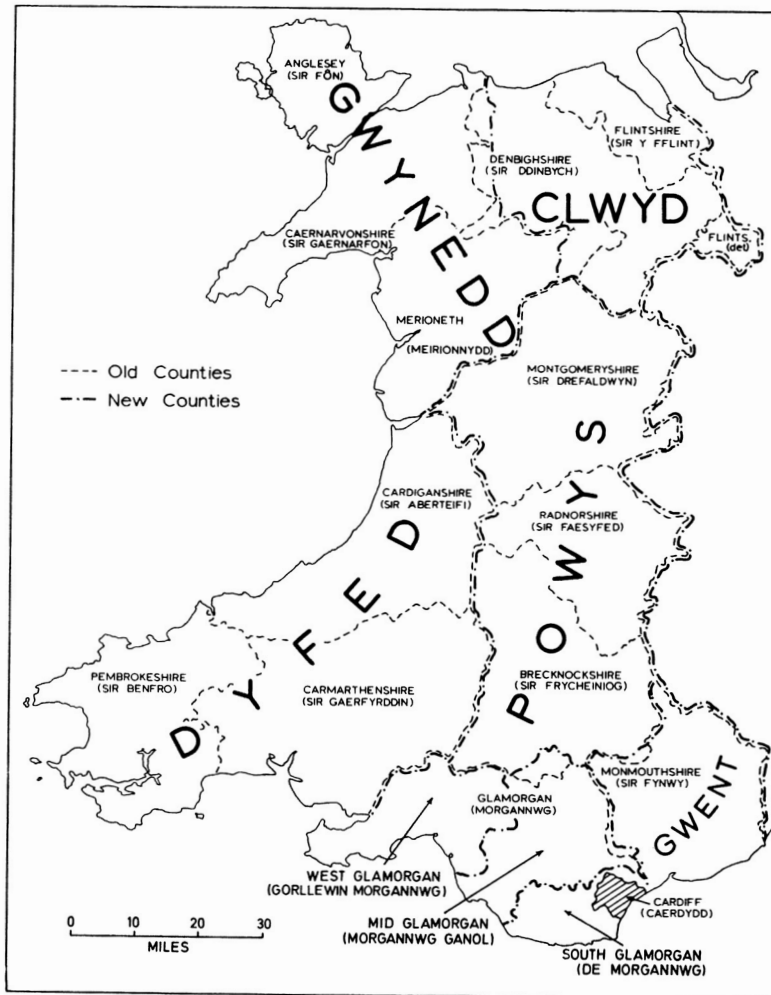
Thus, on my first visit, I only saw a small part of the hospital. Clwyd Wynne explained that it would really require a few hours to give me a complete tour. This, along with the surprise that was to be in store for me regarding the 'little collection', was to be for another time. On future visits I was to appreciate the vast amount of work that had gone into what turned out to be a vast collection of photographs and documents concerning the history of the hospital. I was also to have the privilege of learning much more about the hospital from retired staff members, especially John D. Williams and Dai Bryn Jones. I also learned a great deal of local history from Bobi Owen. Their input into this book has been enormous and their enthusiasm a constant source of inspiration.

Meanwhile I visited the county archives, and gradually became familiar with the collection of material deposited there, which had already been listed and ordered. The service offered by Clwyd Archive Service (later Denbighshire Record Office) has been second to none. This has probably been the largest and longest-running project they have ever encountered. It has at many times caused them trouble and inconvenience. For the efficient

and professional service offered, and for the congenial company and warm and friendly atmosphere, I am deeply grateful. I offer special thanks to Kevin Mathias, who throughout has been in charge of the archive office, and to Jane, Mavis, Karen, Catrin, David and Rowland. My warmest thanks to Alice Langford Jones for her dedication to preparing a large historical database, which forms a lasting legacy of this project. Thanks, too, to Dr David Healy for a shared enthusiasm for the value of this database of case histories and for many fruitful discussions.

Throughout I have received moral support from my family and especially from my husband Dai, without whose encouragement and assistance this book would not have been completed.

The author and publisher gratefully acknowledge the permission of Denbighshire Record Office to reproduce photographs and document extracts from their collection.



Map of the Welsh counties before and after local government reorganization in 1974. Further reorganization in 1996 led to the restoration of the county name of Denbighshire, though with altered boundaries.

Archival Sources

The main depository for the records of the North Wales Hospital, Denbigh, is the Denbighshire Record Office at Ruthin.¹ The key reference number for the collection is HD/1. The first deposit was made in February 1974, the second in December 1980, two in 1986, others in 1989 and 1993, and a final miscellaneous collection was transferred to the archive in 1996 when the hospital closed. The earlier deposits were each catalogued at different dates following transfer to the archives, but the latest deposit has yet to be catalogued.² The ordering of the schedule reflects this time sequence so that, for instance, the annual reports are variously filed as HD/1/1–14, HD/1/88–9 and HD/1/131–3. There is an almost full run of annual reports, and issues missing from the sets of bound volumes in the hospital collection have been found elsewhere (for example, in other collections at the DRO, and in the library of the University of Wales, Bangor). The bound volumes cease in 1939, although some subsequent reports are available in the hospital collection up until 1955. For the years 1950–60 use was made of the Board of Control Reports held at the Public Record Office, MH95/1.

The minute book of the founders (DRO HD/1/81) provides a detailed account of the activities of the subscribers and founders in setting up and building the hospital. The minute books of the various committees provide a detailed picture of the day-to-day running of the asylum and of the complex decision-making processes at work in the institution (HD/1/15–56, 83–7, 151–63). They also minute various issues that were discussed at sub-committee level, but did not surface in the annual reports (for example, the discussions over sterilization of female patients).

The Rule Books outline the formal structure of the asylum and are located at HD/1/69–80. Staff ledgers provide details of salaries, wages, staff applications, working conditions, superannuation, length of service, payments to widows and orphans, etc. (HD/1/116–30). A collection of account books, cash books and ledgers offer a detailed picture of the financial management of the institution (HD/1/90–115, 246–66). Separate accounts were kept for the farm, as well as milk registers and stock books (HD/1/136–50).

Probably the most valuable and certainly the most voluminous sections of the collection are the records relating to patients – the patient registers, certification papers and case notes. The admission registers provide details of every patient admitted, whether private or pauper, male or female, giving age, address, occupation, cause of insanity, diagnosis, where first confined and whether or not a first admission. When patients were admitted more than once, they were assigned a new admission number each time, but dates of previous admissions were usually entered. There were separate registers of discharges and deaths, although generally the date of death or discharge was pencilled into the admission register. Together these ledgers provide basic data for a comprehensive profile of patient admissions. The admissions details for all patients entering the asylum in each decennial census year were entered into a database for analysis as part of this research project. Admissions registers are located at HD/1/294–328; discharge registers at HD/1/387–90, 394–409 and HD/1/275; registers of deaths at HD/1/415–26 and 430.

Until 1930 patients could not enter the hospital on a voluntary basis and for legal ‘certification’ documentation providing written evidence of behaviour considered symptomatic of insanity witnessed prior to committal had to be completed.³ The reception orders are bundled in sequence and retained in large archive boxes (HD/1/455–505). Each certificate has to be carefully unfolded and some certificates enclose further information or letters. The clerical staff at the Denbigh Asylum copied most of the salient details from the certification papers into the patient case books. Only a small sample of certificates was analysed for this study, in order to verify that for the most part details were faithfully transcribed into the case books.

Patient case notes form the basis of the detailed descriptions of patients in this book. On admission the medical officer would examine a patient and write a summary in the case book. The certification details were transcribed and certain basic information was also entered, for example, whether the patient was suicidal on admission, whether epileptic, state of nutrition, catamenia, etc. Case notes were compiled to meet the needs of government and institutional bureaucracy and kept as records of clinical judgements.⁴ Case histories do not offer us a full or rounded portrait of the patient but rather a series of snapshots seen through the eyes of a medical observer. Nonetheless they do offer an opportunity for historical researchers to develop a social epidemiology of asylum patients, which is crucial to a fuller understanding of the institution. For without knowing ‘more about (those) who were admitted, when, and what became of them, it is impossible to generalize about the social function of the asylum’.⁵ A 10 per cent sample of all patients admitted to the asylum between 1875 and 1937 was entered into a database for quantitative and qualitative analysis. The entire case notes were entered into a free text database and although extensive use has been

made of individual patient histories in this book these only constitute a small fraction of the total. Patient case notes are located at HD/1/331–86 and HD/1/506–19. For all the case notes mentioned in chapter 6, see the typed transcript of case notes, arranged in alphabetical order, in DRO Denbigh Hospital uncatalogued deposit.

When the hospital was closing vast quantities of paperwork had to be cleared from the building. The logistics of this operation were awesome. In the basement the case files of every patient admitted to the hospital since 1937 were stored. The files of all patients who had died in the hospital since that date were stored in the attic and were known simply as the ‘dead files’. There was also an enormous collection of outpatient records. Owing to statutory requirements governing the retention of medical records the hospital was obliged to retain all case files relating to any patient who had received treatment within the previous twenty-five years, and to retain patient records for twelve years after death. Consequently it was necessary to identify only those records not falling into these categories before destroying any patient case files. The timescale for clearing the hospital site did not allow for selection of files eligible for destruction according to these criteria. Consequently all of the case records were temporarily retained and removed in lorry loads from the Denbigh hospital and deposited with the new health trusts and hospitals. Some of the records transferred to the Hergest Unit at Ysbyty Gwynedd have since been destroyed, but a 10 per cent sample was retained and deposited at Gwynedd Archives. At the time of going to press records stored at the Princess Alexandra Hospital in Rhyl also face destruction.

Central government records relating to the Denbigh hospital are located at the Public Record Office at Kew and located mainly amongst the records of the Lunacy Commissioners and the Board of Control. Newspapers provide another valuable source and *The Times*, the *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald* and the *North Wales Chronicle* were chiefly consulted for this study. A collection of newspaper cuttings kept by the hospital (HD/1/284) proved especially useful.

Some photographs were deposited by the hospital at the Denbighshire Record Office (HD/1/442–51), but the hospital history group gathered many more photographs and these provide a superb visual record of the history of the hospital. So many people over the years have contributed to securing the safe custody of all the hospital records used in this study. Their efforts deserve recognition.

List of Abbreviations

AR	Annual Report
ECT	Electroconvulsive Therapy
DRO	Denbighshire Record Office
GRO	Gloucestershire Record Office
MOR	Medical Officer's Report
NHS	National Health Service
NLW	National Library of Wales
OT	Occupational Therapy
PP	Parliamentary Papers
PRO	Public Record Office
RCV	Report of the Committee of Visitors
RMS	Report of the Medical Superintendent
RVC	Report of the Visiting Commissioners
UCNW	University College of North Wales (now known as UWB or University of Wales, Bangor)

Throughout the text the hospital is referred to in a variety of ways. The official name underwent a number of changes. Opened in 1848 as the North Wales Lunatic Asylum, in 1858 it became the North Wales Counties Lunatic Asylum. Following the 1913 Mental Deficiency Act it dropped the term 'lunatic' and became the North Wales Counties Asylum. Following the 1930 Mental Treatment Act it became the North Wales Counties Mental Hospital. With the creation of the National Health Service in 1948 responsibility passed from the counties to central government and so the hospital then became the North Wales Mental Hospital. Following the 1959 Mental Health Act the name was changed to the North Wales Hospital. Sometimes it is referred to by its colloquial name of the Denbigh asylum or the Denbigh hospital to avoid tedious repetition. The official titles have occasionally been abbreviated to:

NWLA	North Wales Lunatic Asylum
NWCLA	North Wales Counties Lunatic Asylum
NWCMH	North Wales Counties Mental Hospital
NWMH	North Wales Mental Hospital