

## Book Reviews

methodically canvassed and sifted through a large amount of archival information. An appendix on financial sources and methodology as well as a comprehensive bibliography of primary and secondary sources round up a well-written book.

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**Peter Bartlett and David Wright** (eds), *Outside the walls of the asylum: the history of care in the community 1750–2000*, London and New Brunswick, Athlone Press, 1999, pp. xiv, 337, £45.00 (hardback 0-485-11541-7), £16.99 (paperback 0-485-12147-6).

Peter Bartlett and David Wright begin their edited volume by quoting from the opening lines of my *Museums of madness*, a book which they are kind enough to call “arguably the most influential monograph on the history of psychiatry in Britain”. For me, at least, the effect of this compliment is somewhat spoiled when they immediately proceed to mis-state my central thesis: “In stark juxtaposition, Scull contrasts the open and tolerant care of the insane in pre-industrial communities with the restrictive incarceration of the Victorian period . . . as a new regime of discipline and surveillance replaced social tolerance and individual liberty” (p. 1). Nor is this just a matter of my injured authorial *amour-propre*, for it is around this historiographic issue that they claim to have framed their collection of papers. It is as well, then, to clarify at the outset where I believe that they have misrepresented my position and, more generally, that of a whole generation of historians who, they claim, have mistakenly placed the asylum at the centre of psychiatric historiography.

In the first place, I went to great pains in *Museums of madness* to attack the notion of

“a mythical pre-institutional Golden Age, when the population at large enjoyed the blessings of living in ‘communities’—an innocent rustic society uncorrupted by the evils of bureaucracy, where neighbour helped neighbour and families gladly ministered to the needs of their own troublesome members, while a benevolent squirearchy looked on, always ready to lend a helping hand . . . what we know of the treatment either of the clearly frenzied or of problematic people in general lends little support to such romantic speculations” (pp. 261–3). Second, as the subtitle of my book reveals, my central concern was “the social organization of insanity in nineteenth-century *England*”, not Britain, and this distinction is important, for the history of madness in the Celtic fringe is clearly quite distinct from the English experience.

Four of the eleven papers that make up Bartlett and Wright’s volume elaborate upon that distinction: R A Houston marshals a variety of evidence from eighteenth-century sources to document Scotland’s distinctive approach to the mentally incapacitated in that period, and Harriet Sturdy and the late William Parry-Jones re-examine the Scottish boarding-out system of the nineteenth century (a phenomenon the latter had first examined in a pioneering paper on the Gheel colony system and its influence as long ago as 1981). Oonagh Walsh, in a rather sloppy paper, looks at some of the peculiarities of the Irish response under British colonial governance, claiming *en passant* to substantiate “David Wright’s recent suggestion that families, rather than the asylum authorities, regulated admissions to asylums” (p. 141). (A quarter century ago, I suggested that the very availability of the asylum “tended to encourage families to abandon the struggle to cope with the troublesome” and that “it was this *lay* conception of what was and was not behaviour which could be borne which fixed the boundary between the sane and the

insane” [pp. 253, 239, emphasis in the original].) And David Hirst and Pamela Michael examine, in a rather more satisfactory fashion, the reasons for the persistence of a much stronger tradition of family care of lunatics in nineteenth-century Wales, and the factors that impelled either families or Poor Law authorities none the less to institutionalize some of their number.

Four other papers concern themselves with twentieth-century matters. Jan Walmsley and her co-authors focus on the treatment of the mentally “deficient” rather than the mentally ill between 1913 and 1945. Theirs is by some measure the dullest paper in the collection, displaying little distance from their sources and little by way of analytic perspective on the issues discussed. The remaining papers in this section concern themselves with various aspects of the post-Second World War period, an era all acknowledge was marked by the shift away from Victorian bins back into some version of “community care”. *Vis-à-vis* what Bartlett and Wright claim is the emerging historiographic debate about the centrality of the asylum to the history of psychiatry from the nineteenth century to the Second World War, they are, of course, an irrelevance, and, on their own terms, none of them struck me as particularly penetrating. John Welshman surveys the well-known gap between the rhetoric and the reality of community care between 1948 and 1974 without adding anything distinctive, empirically or analytically, to what is already known; Jim Campbell contributes a moderately useful overview of the convergence of Northern Ireland mental health policy with its English counterpart during the time of the “troubles”; and Sarah Payne briefly examines some of the backlash against treatment in the community in the 1980s and 1990s.

*Pace* Bartlett and Wright’s opening comments, therefore, this means that only three of the eleven substantive chapters in their collection are even remotely concerned with lunacy in nineteenth-century England

and its historiography. In their various ways, these are substantively the most interesting papers in the volume, yet individually and collectively they in no sense constitute the sort of assault on an earlier received “wisdom” that the editors lead us to expect. Hilary Marland examines puerperal insanity, which in the early nineteenth century was a somewhat contested terrain, with both obstetricians and alienists vying for jurisdiction over the problem. The former group contended that “women suffering from puerperal mania were not like other insane patients, and should be protected from the stigma of the asylum” (p. 57)—a view often welcomed by the victims’ families, and one that helps to account for an initially greater reliance on domestic treatment in such cases. By the latter part of the century, however, this perspective “was to some extent lost”, as the views of alienists moved to the fore, and “puerperal insanity became absorbed into general asylum regimes and therapeutics [and] takes on a gloomy and frightening aspect” (pp. 63–5). Not much here by way of critique of an earlier asylum-focused historiography.

Akihito Suzuki has been the author of a number of extremely original and penetrating papers exploring “the family’s need and the institution’s power and authority” (pp. 116–17) when it came to managing madness. Here he contributes a fine paper drawing upon the surviving records of an important set of legal proceedings, those “commissions of lunacy by inquisition” which inquired into the mental status of certain rich potential patients. As he notes, “the existence of a lunatic in a family itself destabilized the boundary between the public and private spheres and invited forceful intervention from the outside world” (p. 117). With great creativity, he explores these rich resources to penetrate the generally hidden recesses of domestic life, and to illuminate families’ attempts “to contain and enclose the lunatic in the private sphere and to prevent his or

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her lunacy becoming a public problem” (p. 119). There are, as he forthrightly acknowledges, two essential limitations on his findings: they relate only to the rich, for whom alone the expense of a lunacy inquisition was either possible or desirable; and the data that have survived relate very largely to only the two decades between 1825 and 1845, immediately preceding the heyday of the asylum.

Melling, Forsythe, and Adair have been engaged on a long-term, Wellcome Trust funded study of lunacy in Devon. Their work (and it should be acknowledged, other work by Bartlett, Wright, and others not reported here) has given us a far more nuanced and complex portrait of the complexities that marked the interactions of families, Poor Law authorities, the community, and the asylum. Their paper in this volume, assessing crime, violence, and welfare in admissions to the Devon County asylum between 1845 and the outbreak of the First World War, is a useful extension of their earlier research, though hardly as path-breaking as earlier pieces they have written. Taken together, this body of work, appearing over the last half-dozen years or so, has indeed greatly enriched our understanding of the complexities of madness and its management in the Victorian age. It would be a gross overstatement, however, to suggest that it has succeeded in dislodging the asylum from its central place in the psychiatric history of that period.

Overall, then, this collection is of extremely variable quality. Several of the essays it contains are worth the attention of specialists; many are not. As a whole, the volume fails to hold together as a coherent book. Nor, I am afraid, does it constitute the kind of innovative and pathbreaking contribution to the historiography of psychiatry that the editors claim for it.

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**Alastair Johnson** (ed.), *The diary of Thomas Giordani Wright, Newcastle doctor, 1826–1829*, Publications of the Surtees Society, vol. 206, Woodbridge, Surtees Society and Boydell Press, 2001, pp. xiv, 366, £40.00, US\$70.00 (hardback 0-85444-045-3).

Some twenty years ago I spent several months hunting through county record offices and libraries for manuscript and published records of general medical practice between 1750 and 1850. I found far more than I had imagined I would, including some extensive manuscripts; but for richness of social and medical detail I found nothing that came anywhere near this work, the diary of Thomas Giordani Wright. For anyone like me with an interest in medical practice in provincial England in the first half of the nineteenth century, this diary is the most magnificent source I have seen.

Wright, who died aged ninety in 1898, spent most of his life in Wakefield where he became a moderately distinguished physician. But the diary starts in 1824 when, at the age of sixteen, he was apprenticed to a surgeon-general practitioner in Newcastle upon Tyne: and the diary covers his next five years, first as an apprentice and then as an assistant. Wright was an ambitious lad, proud of his work, optimistic, and, as befitted a professional gentleman, he was a bit of a fussy dresser. He was fond of the girls, and fond of music (his father was a musician and Thomas played the flute and had a go at composing), fond of dancing and going to the theatre, and fond of reading widely, including medical periodicals and medical texts in French as well as English. As a young man keen to make his mark as a writer (hence the diary), he built up a library of his own and was immensely proud to be elected to the Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle upon Tyne.

As one would expect from a diarist so