I had been hoping to read this book for some time, but had never got round to it; the self help message in the title slightly put me off and, to be honest, I was weary of reading more books about my diagnosis.

However, I found the book illuminating; crammed full of references and first-person accounts. It is a jointly written publication by a psychiatrist (Stephen Lawrie) and journalist (Erica Crompton, who has a diagnosis of paranoid schizophrenia)

It ranges extremely widely, covering everything from what psychosis is and what treatments seem to work, to homelessness, stigma, diet, exercise and community mental health teams. It recommends further traction from negative thoughts, to homelessness, stigma, diet, exercise and community mental health teams. It is a tribute to Clare that he is able to recall the minutiae of his abnormal reasoning, the idiosyncratic meanings attributed to ordinary and trivial incidents and objects. Even at his worst, when his thinking is entangled, bizarre and chaotic, he retains an intense observing self that is steadfast and unblinking in its pursuit of witnessing his situation.

The examples of psychopathology are a gift to a psychopathologist like me:

‘Notice that man touching his hat, indicating that person over there making a strange flicking gesture? Follow the gesture and you come to that young woman over there who, returns it to me’…

Horatio Clare’s account of his episode of severe psychosis is in two parts. In the first part he describes in granular detail the deterioration of his mental state. This is a harrowing and grim account that is lucid and gripping. The architecture, structures and inner furnishings of madness are exposed to our gaze. In some respects, it is far too detailed, far too uncompromising in its honesty, making for hard reading. It is a tribute to Clare that he is able to make for hard reading. It is a tribute to Clare that he is able to recall the minutiae of his abnormal reasoning, the idiosyncratic meanings attributed to ordinary and trivial incidents and objects. Even at his worst, when his thinking is entangled, bizarre and chaotic, he retains an intense observing self that is steadfast and unblinking in its pursuit of witnessing his situation.

The intricacies of the reasoning and experiences underlying potentially dangerous acts are made comprehensible such that it is clear how close he came to disaster, if the foregoing had not been disastrous enough:

‘The radio tells me to leave a candle burning and a cushion near the door. Leave the door unlocked. They will take care of all the bugs and cameras. You get out and the answer coming back, partly from the radio, partly from my thoughts, no, leave that to the professionals. They will take care of all the bugs and cameras. You get out of the house. Leave the door unlocked’.

The adverse impact on family life, the manner in which the disruptive and unpredictable behaviours ate at the seams of relationships, causing turmoil, worry, terror but also how love, friendship and family sustain what had become a tenuous and precarious existence are all described. He shows how social class, standing and a cultured use of language can distort perceptions, ameliorating what is overtly serious as well as protecting from the worst possible outcomes. In other circumstances this would have been an outright, irredeemable tragedy.