Writing this book has been a fascinating and troubling process, one that has led us into many archives and libraries and involved numerous interactions with scholars from many disciplines. Our research and writing took place alongside many public engagement activities, which brought us into contact with people in prison or who have been in prison, making us ever more aware of the enduring nature of many of the issues that we discuss in this book. It has led us to reflect on the continuing high rates of mental illness in prisons, and, despite the efforts of prison services and organisations working to reform prisons and improve care and conditions, the ongoing challenges of providing effective responses and treatment. We have also been made aware of the obstacles involved – both current and historical – in removing prisoners experiencing mental ill health from the prison system and of preventing them entering the system in the first place. One of our intentions in writing this book was to offer the backstory of the emergence of prison psychiatry and an exploration of the experiences of prisoners suffering from mental disorders in the past. It also provides an examination of the impact of prison disciplines in the modern prison, initially introduced under a banner of reform and effective rehabilitation, on the minds of those experiencing these regimes and on the medical staff tasked with implementing them.

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