



June 2019

**Tadley and District History Society
(TADS) - www.tadshistory.com**

**Next meeting - Wednesday 19th June 2019
at St. Paul's Church Hall, 8.00 to 9.30pm**

‘The History of Blood Letting’

By Tim Smith

(Everybody welcome - visitors £3.00)

Important - Notice of Extraordinary General Meeting. (Members only)

An EGM will be held on Wednesday 31st July at 7.30pm in St. Paul's Hall to advise members of the proposals for the closure of TADS. This is because we have had no suitable offers to run the Society.

The Committee

*Comments, queries and suggestions to Richard Brown (0118) 9700100,
e-mail: richard@ilexind.plus.com or Carol Stevens (0118) 9701578*

www.tadshistory.com

TADS Meeting 17th July 2019

‘The Edwardians (1901 - 1910)’

By Tony King

TADS Meeting 15th May 2019

A Place Apart – The Story of Park Prewett Hospital.

by Malcolm Isted.

'Loony Bin', 'Lunatic Asylum', 'Going round the bend' – these words are now thankfully consigned to the bin in the 21st Century. But it's been tough getting here, as there's still so much ignorance and misunderstanding surrounding stuff of the mind.

In fact our younger Royals have been opening-up recently about mental illness and stress, etc. and now 'it's good to talk!' Sadly some youngsters have talked/thought themselves into a state of psychiatric wilderness. On 16.5.19 a daily newspaper reported the number of children locked up in units at mental health hospitals has DOUBLED since 2015. Some are drugged or bound to keep them under control. Not good in 2019. However, counselling is difficult to come by.....

Local retired lecturer and author, Malcolm really empathised with his subject which he happened upon one day, and decided to investigate.

In the early 19th Century there was a 'lunatic asylum' at Knowle near Portsmouth in southern Hampshire. Why not have one up here in the North of the county?

Therefore in 1912 a building was started. But then came WW1 and it was adapted for the War Effort. In 1917-18 it became the 4th Canadian Military Hospital, used to treat shell shock – which we now call PTS Syndrome.

Malcolm researched information from the dour Canadian War Diaries, finding there were 893 patients there and no one much cared about whether they lived or died. In death their graves were anonymous. The Canadians left in 1919 and Park Prewett re-opened in 1921 as a psychiatric hospital in a marvellous rural site. The site circumference was 5 miles (I've walked it) and there was lots going on in the 22 villas and grounds. Between 1922 -1938 it employed many locals, not just as doctors and (untrained) psychiatric nurses but 57 trades were represented: glaziers, porters, cooks, shoemakers, butchers, bakers, upholsterers,

stokers, sewage men, etc. AND they had a farm so the place was a complete entity. It even had a freight-only spur railway line (as did Knowle).

The years 1921-1939 were known as the 'custodial years', housing approximately 1,400 patients. Local magistrates recommended a patient – possibly aided by a G.P. - for the 'asylum'. Park Prewett had open wards but with locked doors, no lockers, no privacy, bars at the always-shut windows. Cutlery was 'shortened'.... there was no medical control, just physical manhandling. Patients were bored and frustrated with only a few allowed to help on the farm or do menial tasks. The Dad of the infamous Ruth Ellis, the last lady to be hanged in G.B. in 1947, had worked at Prewett.

In the 1920s' handbook, Prewett patients were recommended to be 'well-fed and distracted' and to try and live an outdoor life to ward off depression. 'Bad sexual practices' were to be guarded against....

From 1930-1950 malarial therapy was given with infected mosquitos BRED in London to induce fever and to alleviate symptoms. Syphilis turned people 'mad', hot water therapy was good and patients' teeth were extracted to avoid sepsis.....

Rooksdown Hospital was a bit upmarket – providing tennis and car rides.....

At the onset of WWII, 80 patients at Prewett were too ill to be moved and remained while it reverted to military use again between 1940-45. Pioneering plastic surgeon Sir Harold Gillies worked at Rooksdown while his brilliant cousin, Dr. Archie McIndoe of the Guinea Pig Club fame, pioneered plastic surgery for burnt airmen in East Grinstead, Sussex.

Between 1946-1997 it was said that Superintendent Dr. Atkins' Prewett was more like a holiday camp than a psychiatric unit: 3 meals a day, no worries, wall-to-wall activities and outings to the coast etc. - so much so that not having to make decisions, patients became institutionalised although some had deep sleep therapy and lobotomies.

Between 1985-1996 patients were gradually farmed out into the community; and in 1997 Prewett shut. Another purpose-built unit emerged in the grounds: Parklands. An ex-nurse at our meeting empathised and said that the patients were genuine and friendly but many of them should NOT have been incarcerated there. I can vouch for that, having visited Parklands and Broadmoor Hospital as a VISITOR!

Thank you Malcolm, for opening up the unmentionable and unmissable and showing us how much good and empathetic work was done in this hospital near us which was formerly shrouded in mystery and fear.

Rosemary Bond.

What's on? Events which may be of interest.

Milestones Museum. For coming events tel. 01256 477766 or see <http://hampshireculturaltrust.org.uk/milestones-museum>

22-23 June. **Milestones Summer Fete.**

Willis Museum - The museum is running an ever changing series of special exhibitions in the Sainsbury Gallery. The Museum also holds workshops on assorted topics. *For information tel. 01256 465902 or see <http://hampshireculturaltrust.org.uk/venue-events/52>*

22nd June to 14 Sept. **'I grew up 80s'** a 1980s themed exhibition.

Friends of the Willis Museum (7.30 pm at the museum - Non-members £2, booking essential through the museum telephone number 01256 465902)

18th July **'Commander Crabb - What really happened'** by Dr John Bevan

A Guided Walk round Hampstead Norreys, 3rd August.

The walk has been arranged for the Saturday afternoon of 3rd August, assembling at 1.15 pm for a 1.30 pm start from the gate by the church. (There is ample car parking in the area and a toilet at hand).

It is a circular walk of about 2 miles, mostly flat, although there are one set of steps (which can be missed out). There are also stopping places and tea afterwards. The minimum number of participants is 12.

The list is still open and friends are welcome.

Cost £9.00. Please pay at the coming TADS meeting or in July. Payment by cheque payable to TADS - please give to Peter (treasurer).

***TADS annual membership is £18 per person.
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