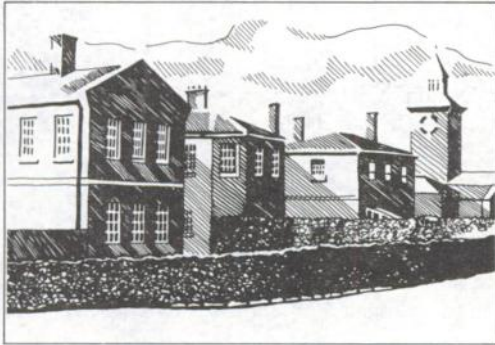


# Asylum History

## Buckinghamshire County Pauper Lunatic Asylum—St John's



By John Crammer

£10, 196pp., ISBN 0 902241 34 6

Why were asylums built, who were the mad put in them, how were they treated there, and what became of them? What happened in Buckinghamshire over 1850–1980 is set against the social history of the times. This book is a timely reminder of the evolution of mental health services, and provides a vital background to hospital closure.

GASKELL



Royal College of Psychiatrists

## Back to the future

### *Drama therapy*

Attendance on theatrical performances has been recommended by some writers. And plays have been acted by the insane in a few instances, both on the continent of Europe and in the United States. On this subject opinion seems divided. One caution is evidently requisite here, that such scenes should be avoided as tend to excite into action the sexual feelings. The effects on the insane performer would seem to be chiefly those of mental revulsion. It is also, however, a question of wide import, how far will prove beneficial or otherwise, the gratification of the love of display, the awakening of emulative feelings, the fear, the hope, and other emotions attendant upon the exercises of the rostrum and the stage. The recreative effect on the insane as spectators must be in general simply the action of other public exhibitions, except that in the case of tragedy, or at a public theatre, the excitement of the emotions might be great. Farce and comedy would seem to be the most suitable performances for such actors and spectators. The experience of Esquirol was decidedly against the institution of theatrical

performances, this being the conclusion which he drew from the effects on the insane at Charenton, attendant on the exhibitions given by them for several years. Dr Browne, on the other hand, so far as regards the consideration of this class of persons merely as spectators, observes, respecting the patients of the Crichton Asylum in Scotland, that the theatre has been an object of great attraction to them, and that this mode of recreation was encouraged for many reasons; but chiefly because the drama conveys much amusement, and some information, without imposing either sustained mental exertion or attention, supplying pastime without passion and knowledge without study, suggesting truth by fiction, and appealing to the happy, the cheerful, and the mirthful parts of our nature.

### *References*

GALT, J. M. (1853) On the reading, recreation and amusements of the insane. *The Journal of Psychological Medicine*, 5, 587.

Research by Susan Floate, Librarian