

A Submerged Site of Therapeutic Endeavour

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In the Second World War there was a Royal Naval Unit for the assessment and rehabilitation of personality disorders in a remote part of the Cheviot Hills. The site is now submerged in the Kielder Reservoir.

In 1980 with the completion of the dam north of Falstone, the Northumbrian Water Authority started to flood the upper part of the North Tyne Valley up to the 600 ft contour. Kielder Reservoir, as it is called, is the largest artificial lake in Europe and is 14 miles long and covers 2,684 acres. Nearly four road miles south of the Border and just north of the Lewis Burn were a collection of huts used by the Forestry Commission and called Kielder Camp (OS map reference NY 648 907).

The Kielder Camp is now submerged, and with its disappearance goes a site of therapeutic endeavour which is of considerable curiosity and some importance in the history of British psychiatry. The camp had originally been a Ministry of Labour Training Centre for unemployed men. In 1941 its disused buildings were taken over by the Royal Navy; the camp was enlarged and named HMS Standard¹ and in February 1942 opened as a centre for the assessment and rehabilitation of Naval personnel, who in present terminology would be regarded as suffering from personality disorders.

As the war progressed there was increasing concern for the number of personnel who were subject to psychological behavioural disabilities, not severe enough to warrant discharge, but nevertheless preventing them from giving full and effective service. HMS Standard was not a psychiatric hospital, but a joint medical and executive venture. Naval neuro-psychiatrists (as they were then called) were posted to the unit and played an active part in assessment, treatment, rehabilitation and disposal of the admissions.

A very full account of the work of the unit was given by Surgeon Lt Cdr R. R. Prewer, who had medical charge of the camp during the latter part of its existence, in an article published in the *Journal of Mental Science* in 1945².

There were three main groups of admissions: low morale, temperamental instability and malingering. The first group were subclassified into 'stress of action', 'constitutional timidity', and 'no ascertainable cause'; the second group into 'psychosomatic', 'incipient psychosis' and 'psychopathic'. These descriptions are of interest in themselves because they reflect the nosological parlance of the day. Many of the admissions had a record of civil and military offences.

The personnel admitted were managed on a strongly disciplined regime in which work and physical recreation were the main activities. The geographically remote site had been deliberately chosen to discourage escape and distraction, and though there was no physical containment, abscondings were rare. Initially there was adequate occupation in forestry and farm work, but this diminished as time went on and the

unit had to develop its own occupational facilities. There was also an accent on education and there were regular classes. Each case was assessed, found a suitable regime and then eventually disposed of in some way—the ideal being a return to some occupation within the Royal Navy where effective service could be given.

HMS Standard closed in July 1945 after functioning for over three years. During that time there were 842 admissions and of these 680 were eventually re-drafted. The average duration of stay was four months. Of the 162 admissions who were discharged from the Service, 60 were given a neuro-psychiatric classification, including six diagnosed as schizophrenic. Of the apparently successfully rehabilitated, some obtained decorations while there were records of 'bad reports' in 105. The follow-up was incomplete.

The story of HMS Standard is of importance because it is one of the first records of institutional care for personality disorders. In wartime conditions it was becoming increasingly clear that proper selection of personnel was essential to the running of a Service which was becoming more and more complicated.

The attention of Service psychiatrists led to increasing interest and understanding of psychopathic and personality disorders which in post-war years became more and more into the province of the developing psychiatric services. This experiment at Kielder was often the subject of discussion amongst psychiatrists and was much in the mind of those who drafted the RMPA's recommendations on psychopathic disorder to the Percy Commission in 1954. When the Act, for the first time, allowed for the detention of patients suffering from psychopathic disorder, it was hoped that special units might be set up for these patients; however, this did not come about.

Although the actual therapeutic effect of the regime of HMS Standard was not very conclusive, it was felt that it had been a real service to the Royal Navy. At the present time the so-called socially inadequate³ pose a special problem to the forensic services. They are not ill enough to warrant a psychiatric hospital, but are totally unsuited to a prison sentence. They are, of course, very much more disturbed than the group who went to Kielder during the War. Nevertheless, they pose the same type of problems, and so perhaps reference to this bold Naval experiment will be helpful in framing a policy towards them.

REFERENCES

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