

THE HORTON CHAPEL PROJECT

Research presented by Katherine Wood

The Role of Sport and Recreation at The Epsom Cluster

Sport and recreation played a significant role in asylum life. Each of the five hospitals in the Epsom cluster had spacious grounds which meant they could boast on-site facilities such as cricket pitches, recreation halls, billiard rooms, football pitches and tennis courts.

An entry in the Horton Medical Superintendent's journal dated 4th November, 1901 outlines plans for a cricket pitch, a few months before the hospital opened its doors:

"I have to report that acting on the instructions of the Committee, Mr G Hearne came to Horton and reported on the cricket ground. His fee was one guinea with 3/. travelling expenses. His estimate for laying out the cricket pitch is submitted." ¹

Early on, it was common for hospital staff to be recruited on the basis of their sporting achievement. Indeed, the question, "What sports do you enjoy playing?" was still being asked in interviews for staff nurses as recently as the 1970s. ²

Henry Rollin, Deputy Superintendent of Horton Hospital from 1948-1976 explains: "In the early years, male nurses, or "attendants" as they were then called, were chosen for their proficiency as instrumentalists or their capabilities as footballers or cricketers rather than for any nursing potential they might have had. An appointment to the staff of a mental hospital could depend on whether there was a need for a left full-back, a spin bowler, a middle-distance runner, or a second trombone". (Henry Rollin) ³

Not only did the recruitment of sportsmen result in a strong and fit workforce, able to fulfil the often strenuous, physical demands of the job, it also reflected positively on the hospital and its staff. "The success of the teams became a symbol of prestige to all concerned, and to win an important inter-hospital competition might well be the highwater mark of the career of a medical superintendent." (Henry Rollin) ⁴

Initially, only the male members of staff participated in sport whilst female staff and the patients watched from the sidelines. Team games such as football and cricket were especially popular.



Long Grove football team, c.1910 (Bourne Hall Museum)



Long Grove cricket team, c.1910 (Bourne Hall Museum)



Long Grove football team 1913-14 (Bourne Hall Museum)

The photograph above was given to Bourne Hall Museum by Mrs Bradbrook. An inscription beneath the photo reads: 'Played 21, Won 18, Draw 3'. A handwritten inscription on the back of the frame reads: 'Freda's father – Frederick Charles Lambert. Long Grove Asylum, Epsom.' In a different hand, two further inscriptions read: 'July Mission 9. 1916 Somme' and 'Maude Idel, Devon'. Frederick Charles is the man marked back far left. He is the father of the donor and was a nurse at Long Grove. He married Maud Lydia Devon, a nurse at Horton Hospital and they lived on Hook Road. He joined the 1st Battalion the Duke of Cornwall Light Infantry and became a Sergeant. He was killed in 1916 on the Somme.

Airing courts

In the early years, patients rarely left the hospital and their exercise was limited to walking around the confined space of airing courts. These were enclosed outdoor spaces that were accessible from the wards and provided access to fresh air. Patients were only permitted to use the airing courts at specific times of day, usually in groups in late morning and mid-afternoon, for an hour or so each time.⁵

Considerable thought was given to the construction of the airing courts at Horton but, it took a while to make the necessary arrangements for patients to gain access to them, as reported in the Medical Superintendent's journal entries of the time⁶:

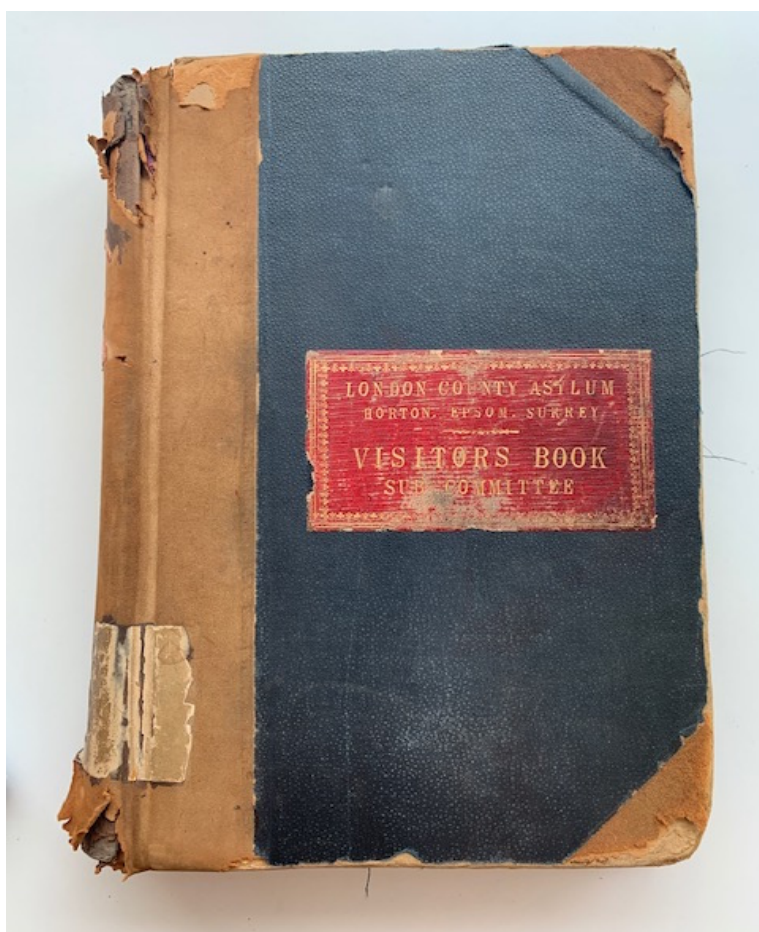
25th February 1901

According to the Committee's instructions, I beg to report that I have considered the question of airing courts and airing court shelters. As regards airing court shelters, I have to recommend the Cane Hill type, a sketch of which accompanies this report, and that there shall be one to each

court, including if possible, the villas and infectious hospital, to be erected as near the centre of the court as is convenient. I agree with the arrangement of airing courts shown in Mr Hine's plan (herewith), but recommend most strongly that the railings of the outer courts shall be sunk out of sight in a foss or ditch. The type of iron railings shown in the accompanying plan is the same as is in use at Bexley. I understand that it has been demonstrated to the Committee, that a man of ordinary strength can bend these sufficiently to escape therefrom. I have therefore to recommend that stronger railings than these - which it would be impossible to bend - be substituted.

7th October, 1901

I have to report to the Committee that the arrangement of the airing courts with asphalt paths at Bexley seems to me a convenient one. I have to suggest that the male and female epileptic and acute airing courts (six in number) be commenced as soon as convenient.



Here are some excerpts from the Horton Visitor's Book by the Commissioners in Lunacy who visited the hospitals regularly and wrote reports on their findings ⁷:

13 July, 1902

The patients to whom we spoke seemed for the most part happy and contented but two of them complained that they were not allowed walking exercise outside the Asylum.

15th July, 1902

External exercise for the patients has not yet been organised.

We had a few complaints respecting the absence of walks outside the asylum grounds; and on enquiry, we understand that during the organisation of the work incidental to the opening of the asylum, it has not yet been found possible to arrange for

such walks. But that early arrangements in this behalf will be made.

Several years later, the Commissioners of Lunacy commented on the exercise provision for hospital patients at Horton. By 1924, the introduction of games in the airing courts was suggested as a way of alleviating the boredom of simply walking around an enclosed space.

"The number of patients walking outdoors, like those attending church, was regularly cited for public consumption as an indicator of a good, well-regulated asylum." ⁸

29th July 1905

Only 2 percent of patients go for walks beyond the Horton Asylum Estate and as many as 51 percent are altogether confined to the airing courts for exercise.

7th July 1908

We pointed out to Dr Lord that one of the women's airing courts which serves as many as 388 patients is of insufficient dimensions for its purpose.

13th December 1910

The returns for 1909 show that the proportion of those taken for walks outside the estate, and on the estate respectively, is 13 percent. In each case, this was somewhat low.

10th October 1924

We learnt that only some 10 percent of the patients walk out beyond the asylum estate, and that none of the women go for walks within the grounds. We hope that it can be arranged that such walks are taken daily by parties. The airing courts are generally very well kept and well supplied with trees and shrubs. We hope that games may be started in some of them to relieve the monotonous walking round.

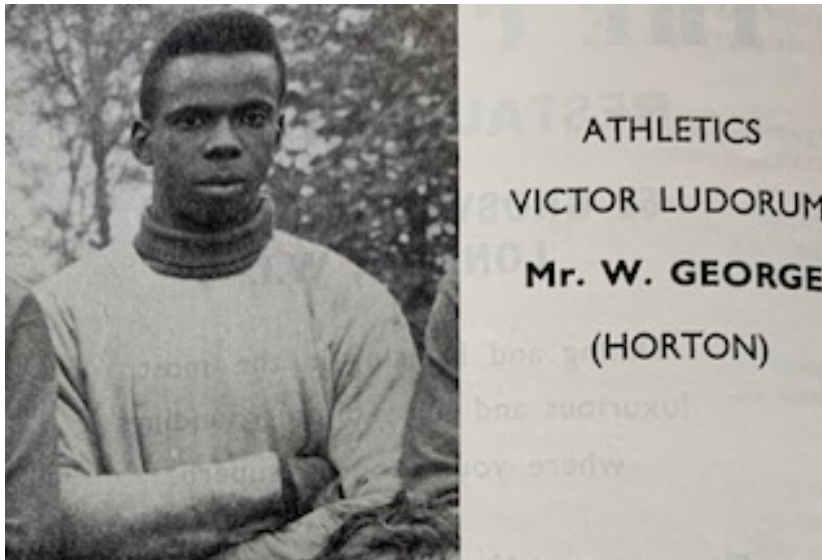
London Mental Hospital Sports Association (LMHSA)

In 1927, the London Mental Hospitals Sports Association was founded. Its aim was to foster interest in sports, social and cultural activities, and to promote inter-hospital competitions among all staff employed in the hospitals. It brought together staff of all grades and nationalities. All five of the Epsom hospitals were represented in the Association, alongside other hospitals in the London area including Banstead, Springfield, Cane Hill, Netherne, Broadmoor and Bethlem-Maudsley.

The first sports meeting of the Association was held in the grounds of Horton Hospital on Saturday 16 July 1927. Music was supplied by Long Grove Military Band at the cost of £5. The prizes were distributed by Mrs R Dunn-Gardner JP and she presented the Cup which was awarded to the hospital which gained the most points at the Athletics meeting. Standards improved year on year, both with regards the sports themselves and also with the hospitality and catering. Indeed, even the Catering Officers at the hospitals got involved, holding their own contest to see who could put on the best meal for the visiting teams! ⁹

Horton was considered to have by far the best facilities and hosted the annual sports meetings for many years. There was a fierce level of competition between the hospitals. The matches were played by staff members and considered entertainment for the patients who watched from the sidelines.

“The provision of adequate recreational and social facilities does a great deal towards creating a happy and contented atmosphere among the staff, who inevitably get to know one another better and to understand one another's day to day problems as a result of casual and informal conversation at hospital social events. The encouragement of outdoor sporting activity can play its part in building up a healthy active staff with interest in the hospital life extending beyond the narrow confines of their day to day duties.” ¹⁰



In 1967, teams from Horton sensationally won all of the Men's Track events, taking 12 of the 21 cups awarded.

W. George received the *Victor Ludorum Trophy*, having won the 100 yards competition and being a member of the winning Relay Team.¹¹

Stolen trophies!

In September 1984, three of the London Mental Hospitals Sports Association's trophies were stolen from a cabinet at Bethlem Royal Hospital. This is reported in the third edition of the Association's Yearbook. One of the trophies was the Dunn Gardner Cup, a particularly fine trophy in the Association's collection. It was valued at approximately £6,000.

The police swiftly recovered the missing trophies but they were found in a very badly flattened condition with no chance of repair. The mangled remains were given back to the Association and the recovery value of the silver when sold was a mere £362.77 – a considerable disappointment that did little to lessen the blow of losing such a magnificent and significant trophy. Bethlem was not insured against the loss which frustrated the LMHSA committee and, in the LMHSA annual for that year, all member hospitals were asked to ensure that any sporting trophies in their possession were covered by insurance to protect against such a terrible situation from occurring again.¹²

First World War

In 1915, Horton Asylum was taken over by the Army Council and it became the Horton (County of London) War Hospital, a general hospital for wounded servicemen from all parts of the Empire during WWI. To prepare for their arrival, 2,143 patients were transferred to the other asylums in the area. In 1919, after it had treated over 46,000 patients, the War Hospital was handed back to the London County Council.



Bowls, 1916 – Hospital Postcard (Bourne Hall Museum)

Lt. Col. J.R. Lord was the Medical Superintendent of Horton Asylum during the First World War and he detailed the transformation of the hospital into a military facility in his book entitled 'The Story of the Horton (County of London) War Hospital: Epsom' which was published in 1920. Here is an extract that specifically mentions recreation and sport:

"The wards had been equipped with a variety of games and almost every ward had a piano and a small billiard table. The soldier's recreation room soon became a popular resort of the patients. All the large billiard tables had been erected here and there was a plentiful supply of comfortable chairs and settees, table games, newspaper stands – in fact, all the appointments of a working man's club. Arrangements were made to make full use of the large and well-equipped stage. Mr Taylor, the Home Steward, working in connection with the Lady Almuner (?) undertook the management of the Recreation Hall as a theatre and soon there were concerts, theatrical entertainments, variety shows in full swing almost every day, often twice daily.

Neither was the welfare of the soldiers neglected when out of doors. Mr Sidney F Jackson, who had already been very generous with the hospital and which was continued until the hospital closed was appointed Director of Outdoor Recreation & Pastimes. He took charge of the recreation grounds and soon tennis and cricket were in full swing. He also organised a service of motor and other vehicles to take the patients out for country drives especially those who were unable to get about and explore the beauties of the neighbourhood for themselves. I attached a great importance to the provision of healthy recreation for the soldiers, especially during convalescence as a valuable tonic to the nervous system which to a lesser or greater degree was certain to suffer in warfare." ¹³

Inter-war years

Photographs from the 1920s to the late 1930s show patients enjoying the first-rate gymnasium facilities at the Manor Hospital. Presumably these were primarily made available to, and used by, members of staff. It can also be reasonably assumed that other facilities, such as the Horton tennis courts, were also used by the patients. In addition, we know that each ward had a billiards/snooker table. Sporting and physical activity opportunities were therefore open to patients during the inter-war years but it is unclear how widely available these were and whether any organised inter-ward and intra-hospital patient sporting events took place.



Men exercise in the gymnasium (Manor Hospital, 1925) ¹⁴



Tennis courts (Horton Hospital, 1938) ¹⁵



The billiard room (St Ebba's Hospital, 1938) ¹⁶



Women exercise in the gymnasium (Manor Hospital, 1939) ¹⁷



Disabled patients play volleyball during a visit by Mr Ernest Bevin, the Minister of Labour and National Services (Horton Hospital, 1943) ¹⁸



Manor Hospital Hockey Team 1930

Manor Hospital Hockey Team, 1930 ¹⁹

Post-war years

It wasn't until the post-war years, when sport and recreational activities were considered to have therapeutic benefits, that all patients were given access to sports and actively encouraged to take part to improve their health and wellbeing.

“Organised games and exercise contributed to the alleviation of boredom, provided valuable and genuine mental and physical recreation, and enhanced self-esteem and a sense of success among some patients. Thus, whether on a quasi-scientific basis, by chance or for pragmatic reasons, cricket and other sports were internalized into the notion of therapy.”²⁰

Every year, each of the hospitals held a Sports Day. This was a very important date in the hospital calendar and was viewed by many of the staff and patients as the highlight of the summer. Teams made up of patients and staff from the different wards competed against each other in a variety of games and a lot of fun was had by everyone taking part.

Tug-Of-War was a popular competition on Sports Day. Brian Leedham, a student Psychiatric Nurse at West Park in the 1970s recalls...

“I was told (before my time) that the team practiced by tying a large anvil on a rope, and slinging the other rope end over the bough of a large oak tree and pulling the anvil off the ground, taking it in turns to haul it up. That old oak tree is still there on the edge of the field, behind the New Epsom Cottage Hospital (The Poplars).”²¹

Brian competed in rugby matches for the hospital several times, played tennis recreationally and entered the annual Inter-Hospital Sports Day in 1972, putting the shot!



This is one of the oak trees at West Park.

Perhaps it was this tree that was used by the practising Tug-Of-War team!

Whether for therapeutic reasons, or perhaps to relieve overcrowding on the wards, patient access to sports and games was increased during the 1950s and 60s. Cricket and football remained firm favourites and the added provision of tennis, bowls, badminton, darts, gymnastics, hockey, snooker, cross-country running and swimming made hospital life more enjoyable and contributed to the wellbeing and recuperation of patients.



1951 – West Park – Hospital Bowls Cup Winners (Bourne Hall Museum)



1970 – West Park Hospital Cricket Team (Bourne Hall Museum)



Long Grove Cross Country Team, Winners of the Benskin Cup in 1965 (Linda Richards)

This photograph belongs to a former employee at Long Grove, Linda Richards. Her husband, Gwyn Richards, pictured on the far right of the front row, was the Principal of the Nursing School at Long Grove.

Gwyn was responsible for training young people to become professional registered psychiatric nurses. Linda recalls that he thoroughly enjoyed his work and always encouraged students to be involved with sport and motivate patients to take part. All of the men in the team worked at the hospital. The suited gentleman in the centre of the front row is Dr A.B. Munro, Long Grove's Physician Superintendent. Gwyn Richards enjoyed considerable success with the cross-country team and they established a LMHSA record, winning the Benskin Cup for five consecutive years from 1956-1960.²²

Golf for Women

Golf was introduced to the Social and Sports activities for women at Horton in October 1964. By May the following year, interest had grown so rapidly that weekly instruction was given in the gymnasium. They were taught by Mr Eddie Piner who was on the staff of the central Sterile Supply Department at Horton and also a member of the Epsom Artisans Golf Club with a handicap of four. It was hoped that the female team would become good enough to compete in tournaments.

²³

Swimming

In the mid 1960s, plans were approved for a swimming pool to be built at the Manor. Local newspapers reported that the pool was to measure 55ft by 25ft and be heated and covered. At the shallow end, there was to be a ramp to make it easy for disabled people to enter the water. The superintendent physician at the hospital, Dr R Worters, said it would not be used for therapy as such, but that it would boost the self-confidence and give pleasure to patients, some of whom would have found it difficult to use a municipal pool.

The hospital's League of Friends organised fetes and other events, including charity sports matches, to help raise the 20k needed to complete the project. The fundraising received a welcome boost when the King Edward Hospital Fund for London contributed £7k. The pool was officially opened by the Lord Lieutenant of Surrey, the Earl of Munster, in July 1971. He unveiled a plaque and then a swimming display was given by the patients.²⁴

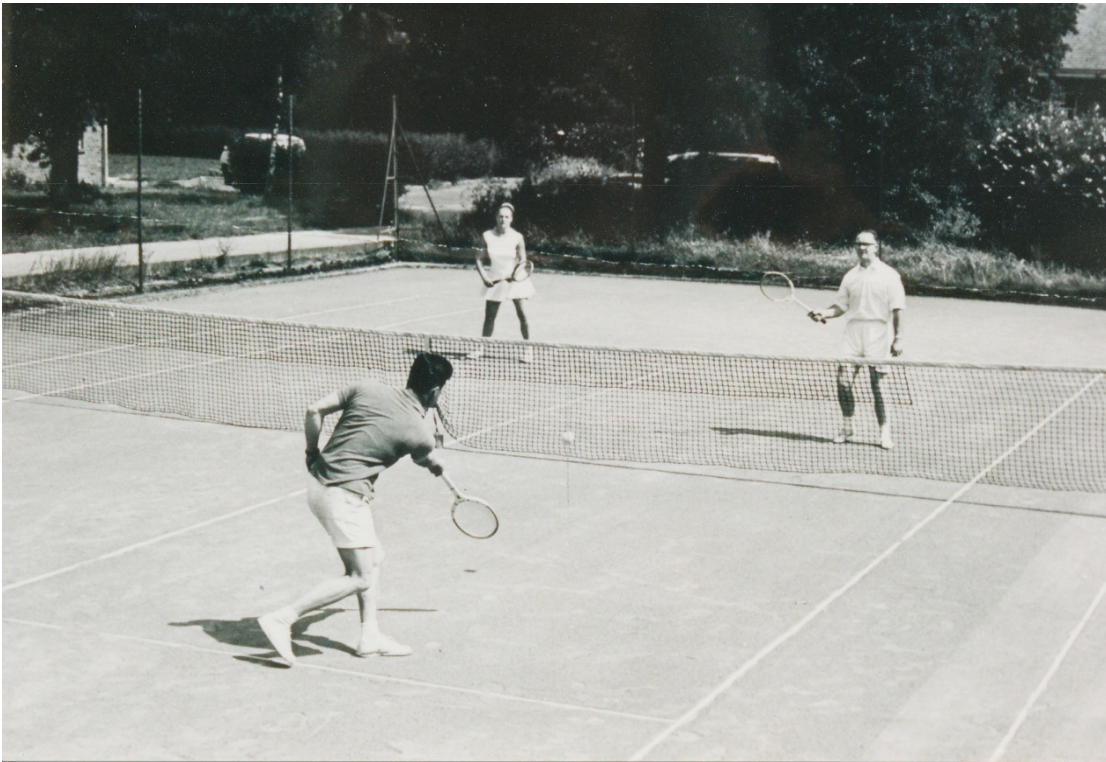


(Swimming Pool at The Manor, Bourne Hall Museum)

The recreation hall at West Park was actively in use from when it opened until the late 1980s and, as these photographs show, the interior remained virtually the same.



(Dates unknown, Bourne Hall Museum)



West Park tennis photos, dates unknown (Bourne Hall Museum)

The West Park Patients' and Visitors' Reference Book from c. 1970 lists the wealth of recreational and sporting options available to patients:

"There is a variety of recreational and social activities at West Park Hospital. Opportunity for sport is also readily available. All wards have radio and television and there are regular cinema shows, occasional dances and concert parties. The patients' social club has a varied programme of activities both during the day and nearly every evening of the week. A physical training instructor organises various sporting activities which include bowls, badminton, cricket, football and athletics." ²⁵

King Edward VII Hospital Fund

The Epsom cluster benefitted from monetary grants from the King Edward Hospital Fund on several occasions during its history. Formed in 1897 as an initiative of the then Prince of Wales, this independent charity allowed for the collection and distribution of funds in support of the hospitals of London. After the NHS was established in 1948, the role of the fund was reappraised and it began to focus its expertise and resources on developing good NHS practice and provided grants to support new initiatives to improve the health of Londoners. Epsom was still considered to be in London at this time and therefore the patients of the five Epsom hospitals benefitted accordingly. A search through the Annual Reports of the King Edward Hospital Fund reveals detailed accounts of the monetary grants awarded to the Cluster.

In 1949, the Fund awarded £5,000 to St Ebba's and Belmont Hospital Management Committee for the "provision of a recreational and educational centre for patients." This financial help is mentioned in the Report of the Physician Superintendent at St Ebba's 1949-51 in which he thanks the "generous help towards amenities for the patients which raised the standard of comfort in the wards, in recreation and entertainment." ²⁶

In 1953, Horton was given £3,500 for the "reconditioning and re-equipment of the recreational hall" and Long Grove was awarded £3,500 for a recreation hut for patients.

30th September to 1st October, 1958

A very well-equipped sports pavilion for the use of the patients and staff has, through the generosity of the King Edward VII Hospital Fund for London, now been completed. The neighbouring three patients' tennis courts have been resurfaced. Cyril M T Hastings - Commissioner of the Board of Control

The Decline Of The Epsom Cluster

Gradually, as the 'care in the community' initiative began in the 1980s, the hospitals began to be emptied of patients and the sporting facilities that had once been so well maintained started to show signs of neglect. They had served their purpose. Slowly but surely, the Epsom cluster buildings began to be converted to modern housing and the large open recreation spaces were left behind.



The old sports pavilion at West Park (Bourne Hall Museum)

When the old Horton site was redeveloped to create a new housing estate, Livingstone Park, the hospital's old sports' ground, became Long Grove Park. Some of the land was used for a primary school and, later on, a public skate park was constructed.

Whilst the asylum patients have long gone, it is pleasing to know that some of the land on which they once played continues to be used recreationally and enjoyed by people today.

(Katherine Wood, January 2020)

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Interview with Christine Elder-Ennis at Horton Haven, Summer 2019

Interview with Linda Richards, former member of staff and wife of Gwyn Richards, Summer 2019

Interview with Tino Georges Ratinon and Mike Soopramania, July 2019

Email correspondence with Brian Leedham, Summer 2019

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- ² Interview with Tino Georges Ratinon and Mike Soopramania, July 2019
- ³ Henry R Rollin (1990) *Festina Lente : A Psychiatric Odyssey*, British Medical Journal
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- ¹⁹ Image courtesy of G Porter, held at the Epsom & Ewell Local & Family History Centre
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- ²⁵ www.countyasylums.co.uk/west-park-epsom
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