

## **Broadmoor**

Harvey Gordon

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"Broadmoor has never operated in isolation and its role needs to be seen in relation to other psychiatric hospitals, prisons and the community more widely. At times of clinical uncertainty, I would catch myself pondering how my predecessors would have dealt with a complex circumstance often at a time when the only treatment available was the effects of the hospital milieu or environment itself. Medical practitioners who might believe their contemporary approach is vastly superior to those who preceded them may be better to adopt a more humble perspective."

Harvey Gordon, ex medical director.

Broadmoor celebrated its 150th anniversary in 1863. Since the late 1970s, it has changed beyond recognition. The women patients have all gone. The number of male patients has fallen from 800 – at one point it was 1200 – to 205. Overcrowding is no longer an issue. The attitudes of the nurses have changed too. The complaints of brutality made in the 1970s and 80s are things of the past. One patient complained then he had seen a doctor for two hours in over two years so he did not think much of the claim that the hospital provided therapy.

The author was a psychiatrist at Broadmoor for 17 years and its medical director for two of those years. He offers a comprehensive history of Broadmoor with vignettes of some of its famous and infamous patients. Richard Dadd, the Oxford Dictionary contributor, John Straffen, Graham Young, Ronnie Kray as well as the less famous John Neish who wrote some nicely ironic poems about being held there as well as James Kelly who escaped in 1888 and turned up at the door in 1928 demanding to be let in again.

He examines the provision for mentally offenders before Broadmoor was built, the balance between therapy and security, Broadmoor and the death penalty, women in the institution, the success of Broadmoor in terms of how often patients re-offend when they are released and the international context.

Broadmoor does not operate in a vacuum and public perceptions not just of the institution but of mental health in general affect the hospital.

"This thoughtful and well referenced history of the U.K; a moat iconic and to some extent notorious hospital is clearly a labour of love...this book will be an invaluable source for future historians as well as being a mature description of psychiatry's dilemmas in the current climate of risk management" Trevor Turner British Journal of Psychiatry.

"Each page contains detailed accounts of individual cases which shows this book for what it is, a wonderfully researched piece which has been the result of years of dedication. Despite the occasionally distressing reports, this book is also a reflection of the positive side to human beings and the compassion which led this country to develop a system which protects society but also aims to treat mentally ill offenders in a humane manner.

Dr Valerie Murphy, Bulletin of the Royal College of Psychiatrists

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