

The times

The last dance

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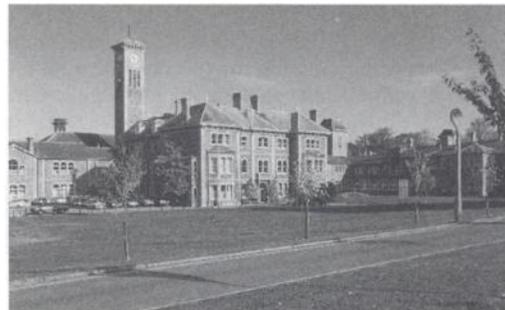
In December we held the last dance. Shortly after 1 a.m. the ghosts of long dead patients would have heard the strains of Auld Lang Syne drifting down the hospital corridors. Perhaps they should have joined us.

Spacious, warm in the winter, cool in the summer, in its own grounds but not isolated, the vast hospital was a safe haven from a community that looked upon it with a mixture of fear, indifference and compassion. In its time the great building would have been a source of pride to our Victorian forefathers even as today we are pleased with the new buildings for our long-term patients and the Secure Unit.

Some stayed away saying it was too sad; others went to celebrate a job well done. We have been fortunate. While the long-term chronic patients moved out at one end of the hospital, as of course they have been doing for many years, so, at the other end the wards are being converted into a College to train all nurses and physiotherapists in Avon and Gloucestershire. For a time we have shared the building and the young students, ever increasing in number, have mingled with the longer term patients in the corridors and in the grounds.

We are now creating a residual hospital on adjacent land that has not been sold. A few weeks ago a very pleasant new building for 40 long-term patients opened, each patient had his or her own room and there are adjoining gardens. This unit will also become the first staging post for those who need to move on from the acute admission ward but still need to live for a period within a hospital setting. Nearby is the sub-regional secure unit opened four years ago. Adjoining these buildings are the existing workshops, a new psychogeriatric unit and a building shortly to be converted into an activities centre and a coffee bar, also the drug addiction unit. In front of this residual hospital is the existing geriatric hospital (Manor Park). The two hospitals will now amalgamate under a new name and share such facilities as pharmacy, conference rooms, out-patients clinic, physiotherapy and so forth.

All this has left the acute admission building somewhat isolated at the other end of the hospital



Glenside Hospital, Bristol

grounds. The staff of this hospital have never been particularly ideologically minded and there is little enthusiasm to move the admission unit up to the district general hospital, even if it was welcome or there was adequate space. Indeed the patients seem to enjoy the peace of the well kept grounds, particularly in the evenings and at weekends when the students have gone.

It remains to be seen if turning a large old asylum into a college will destigmatise it with the passage of time.

Have we got it right? Every month a total of 155 patients come in from the community and the hospital and spend time in the hospital workshops and craft centre. Will more come back to use the newly created activity centre and the coffee bar and perhaps have some enhancement of their social life while still living out in the town around us? Should we have used our money differently and moved all facilities into the community, even though that would have left the RSU and the acute admission unit isolated? The one thing we have which is not easily obtainable outside is space both by way of buildings and grounds.

Farewell to Glenside Hospital. Welcome to Blackberry Hill Hospital and an era of caring in a new type of residual psychiatric hospital which we hope will retain the best of the old and encompass the best of the new.