

## ST. MARY'S HOME, PAINSWICK

### *By John Bailey*

It was in 1890 that Miss Harriett Wemyss took under her wing a woman who had only 3s. 6d. a week to live on and was quite incapable of earning her own living. Miss Wemyss rented a cottage for her and supplied her with food and clothing. It is believed that this woman was one Maud Thomas, aged 54, in 1890, and said to be feeble-minded. She remained at the Home until 1922 when she had to be removed to hospital for treatment.

From this beginning, other women, by reason of some mental or bodily infirmity, found a home in the cottage. Thus St. Mary's Home was established at Falkland House in Gloucester Street, Painswick. The home was known as 'St. Mary's Home for Working Girls (Feeble In Body or Mind)'. Larger premises were soon required and by 1902 were located in St. Mary's Square, Painswick. The Home had moved again to 'Whitehall', the present premises in Stamages Lane, Painswick, now called 'St. Mary's', probably in 1913. 'Whitehall', originally three cottages, had been used as the Painswick Convalescent and Training Home but that closed on 12 December 1912. Their brochure described the location as being on the outskirts of Painswick, commanding fine views and where 'the air is remarkably pure and bracing'. St. Mary's Home was said to be the first institution in the country to provide a permanent home for mentally defective women.

Many problems were encountered in the early formative years. It was always difficult to obtain suitable supervision and training for the inmates and there were constant financial worries. It was initially intended that the Home should be self supporting. This was to be achieved by careful training and supervision of the inmates so that the Home could earn its keep by taking in sewing, knitting, upholstery and washing. Flannel nightdresses trimmed with embroidery were advertised from 7s. 11d.; Flannel Petticoats trimmed with embroidery from 5s. 11d.; Knitted gloves from 2s. 0d. and Ostrich Shawls 4s. 6d. The energy of the founder, Miss Harriett Wemyss, aided by her sister, Miss Alice Wemyss, saw that St. Mary's succeeded.

The first Lady Superintendent was Mrs. Bowly, succeeded by 1902 by Miss M. Cox and followed by Miss L. Coleman by 1906.

#### ROYAL PATRONAGE

The 1912 brochure shows that St. Mary's had achieved a sound basis both administratively and financially. The annual accounts showed that money earned by the Home was being substantially supplemented by contributions from relatives or guardians. The Patron at this time was H.R.H. Princess Christian of Schleswig Holstein (daughter of Queen Victoria). The committee was chaired by the Rev. W. H. Seddon (Vicar of Painswick); the treasurer was W. H. Dickinson, M.P. (Later Lord Dickinson of Painswick); and Miss Harriett Wemyss was honorary secretary.

The report for the year ended 30 September 1913 showed a total income of £1,186 of which £477 was earned by the laundry and workroom. Maintenance contributions amounted to £506, whilst donations and subscriptions came to £82, but there was a small operating loss of £32. Inmates and staff numbered 37. The name of the Home was changed to 'St. Mary's Home (Certified Institution) for Mental Defectives' following legislation introduced in 1913 — the **Mental Deficiency Act** — exercising greater control on institutions such as St. Mary's. Minutes of the Gloucestershire Joint Committee for the Mentally Defective reveal that they were concerned about means of escape in the event of fire. Although arrangements for dealing with an outbreak of fire were considered reasonably satisfactory, the Committee were of the opinion that '... only inmates who are well able to make use of the rope ladder in the Attic should sleep there...!' A further report described the Home as originally three houses knocked into one with a laundry added. For the most part, substantially built of stone, there were three floors and an attic, with laundry annexe of iron and wood. Although the kitchen was good, toilet facilities were criticised as there was only one bath and three water closets in the building. The Home was licensed for 26 female defectives, between the ages of 14 and 25 (at admission), whilst there were eight staff. Mrs. Helen Oddy was Lady Superintendent at this time, followed for one year only by Mena Bird in 1921. She was superseded by Edith Mutimer who held the position into the War years.

#### POST FIRST WORLD WAR

The report for the year 1928-29 shows that the Patron was then H.S.H. Princess Helena Victoria (daughter of Prince and Princess Christian of Schleswig Holstein). The chairman was the Revd. C. H. Verey (Vicar of Painswick); the treasurer was Henry Donne, and Miss M. B. Gibbs was honorary secretary. The Home was then licensed to receive 29 patients, but 'high grade cases only admitted'. Apart from working in the laundry or workshop, the patients were encouraged to participate in a number of leisure activities. Country dancing, community singing, needlework and reading classes were provided. Bible studies were held and there was regular Church attendance. A number of parties and outings were arranged and local walks. Total income had risen to £2,462; payments towards maintenance of patients had gone up to £1,772; laundry receipts had increased to £567, but donations and subscriptions had fallen to £28. Big improvements had been effected during the year. An electric supply was installed throughout the building, and the water system was extended. Fire escapes were fitted outside and the Home was cleaned and painted. With the aid of a loan from Lloyds Bank, a new laundry building was erected in the grounds, and opened on 13 October 1928 by Willoughby Dickinson. The report concluded that a

combined dining and recreation room was greatly needed; garden seats and a wireless set were also required. Finally the report acknowledged the part played by Harriett and Alice Wemyss in establishing St. Mary's Home and for their continued work and interest over a period of some forty years. Both ladies died during 1928.

The 1931-32 report shows that the Revd. A. M. Coode had replaced Revd. Verey as chairman of committee. Welcome was extended by the committee to Edith Mutimer, Superintendent, who had returned following three months absence through serious illness. Total income for the year was £2,292; maintenance contributions were £1,579; subscriptions and donations down to £20, and laundry receipts £559. There were favourable comments upon the laundry activities — the debt having been paid off. However the coppers were said to be unsuitable and dangerous and needed replacement. There had been two visits from Inspectors of the Board of Control who gave excellent reports, but neither were satisfied with the dining arrangements. There was a further plea for a combined dining and recreation room. The kitchen and scullery had been cleaned and redecorated; and a telephone was installed (telephone no. 2341). Garden seats and a wireless set were still needed. Leisure classes continued to be provided and outings were arranged. A performance of 'Cox and Box' by Gilbert and Sullivan was given in the Home by Miss Donne and company.

St. Mary's continued throughout the War years, but a 1943 letterhead showed that Edith Mutimer had been replaced by Miss Eleanor Pearson as Superintendent. The honorary secretary was still Miss M. B. Gibbs, of Yew Tree House; and the treasurer was Mr. G. A. Carse of Glenholt.

The laundry ledger shows that in 1945 there were 81 clients; in 1954 only four clients appear. It seems that the laundry had not been viable for some years and the it closed at the end of 1954.

### THE COMING OF THE N.H.S.

In 1947, St. Mary's was incorporated into the Bristol Group of the newly formed National Health Service administrated by the Hortham-Brentry Management Committee.

Eleanor Pearson was still Superintendent in 1952, and was subsequently followed by Mr. Ian McDonald and by Mr. Maurice Moore up to 1982 — the latter was the first to bear the new title of 'Head of Home'.

Further administrative changes occurred following the County boundary alterations implemented in 1974. St. Mary's was brought within the orbit of the Gloucestershire Community Health Unit and administered from Stroud.

A major change in policy occurred in 1984 when the first male resident was admitted. There have been other gentleman residents at St. Mary's since, although there are none at present.

There was a further change of title in 1993 when the Home's official name was changed to 'St. Mary's Home for Elderly People with Learning Disabilities'. Margaret Benson succeeded as Head of Home in 1982 and she was followed by Kay Cox in 1988. Further administrative changes occurred as from 1 April 1993 when 'St. Mary's' came under the wing of Severn N.H.S. Trust — one of three 'provider units' in the county. Susan Woodcock took over as Head of Home from 1 November 1993 and she leads a largely long serving and devoted staff of sixteen. November also saw the commencement of major internal improvements and re-decoration of St. Mary's.

As a consequence of the various changes in the holding authority over the years, most records of St. Mary's Home have been either lost or destroyed. Among the few records that have been saved are five account books.

### DOMESTIC ECONOMICS

The oldest book is entitled 'Analysis of Housekeeping' and covers the period 17 April 1939 to 29 December 1941. On the Income side, payments for maintenance of patients from various County and City Authorities indicates from whence the patients came. They were from Denbighshire to Somerset and Monmouthshire to Middlesex, as well as from the Cities of Bristol, Cardiff and Gloucester. Maintenance charges appear to have been in the order of £58 per annum. The laundry at this time is shown to have an income of just under £20 per week on average. On the Expenditure side, Miss Edith Mutimer, the Lady Superintendent was paid £108 6s. 8d. per annum. Other staff were paid around £50 per annum, when Miss Eleanor Pearson was appointed Lady Superintendent about October 1941, in place of Miss Mutimer, she was engaged at an increased salary of £140 6s. 8d. per annum. Regular weekly payments were made to village trademen like Tidmarsh the butchers; Painswick Bakery; Co-operative Stores; Burtons Stores; Gloucestershire Dairy Co.; and H. L. Ireland the Newsagents. Horne's Garage featured as regular carriers and there were occasional amounts to J. W. Gooddard for car hire; T. Mills for shoe

repairs, and W. Ireland the chimney sweep. At Stroud there were payments to James and Owen, and Smith and Lee. Other occasional payments were made to the national chains like Boots the Chemists; F. W. Woolworths; Radio Rentals; Bon Marche; Maypole; Mence Smith; and Timothy White and Taylors. Quarterly payments to the utilities were to Stroud Water Co.; Stroud Gas Light and Coke Co.; West Gloucestershire Power Co.; and Stroud Electric Supply Co. An annual fee of 2 guineas was paid to Stroud Hospital and 10 guineas to Dr. Robertson. The wireless licence was 10s. (November 1939). The return bus fare to Stroud was 10d., and to Gloucester 1s. 3d.

The Laundry Ledger refers to laundry earnings from 1 January 1945 to 28 December 1954. At the opening of this ledger there was eighty one clients listed, and as may be expected, included many well known Painswick names: —

Miss Gibbs of Yew Tree House; Mrs. Large of Acacia Villa; Mrs. St. Clair Badderley of Castle Hale; Mrs. Govier of Park House; Mrs. d'Invernois of Capp Mill; Miss Donald of Ludloes; Miss Hyett of Painswick House; Lady Dickinson of Washwell House; Mrs. Tidmarsh of New Street; Mrs. Strange of the Post Office; Miss West of Byfields; Mrs. Gore of Lovedays House and Mrs. Archard of Bank House.

At this time problems were encountered, as tucked into the ledger was a letter dated April 1946 from Miss Pearson, the Lady Superintendent, to all customers. The letter requested customers '... to curtail their laundry ...' as although the war was over, the laundry working materials — soap and fuel — had again been cut, with the consequence that the laundry was working over its capacity. There appeared also to be something of a cash flow problem in that the total of the 'arrears' column was some three times that of the 'work done' column at the end of 1946. This problem continued throughout the late '40s; but by 1950 the number of clients was very much reduced until December 1950 only five remained. Work continued on this very reduced basis until 1954 when only four clients remained. They were: —

Mrs. Ballinger of Tibbiwell Gardens; Mrs. Price of Butt Green; Miss McFarlane of Greenbanks and Mrs. Smith of Cheltenham Road.

The laundry finally closed at the end of 1954.

The Petty Cash book covers the period 28 February 1949 to 31 December 1952, when Eleanor Pearson was Lady Superintendent. Return bus fares were still 10d. to Stroud, 1s. 3d. to Gloucester, and 2s. to Cheltenham. In June 1951 bus fares were increased to 11d. Stroud, 1s. 5d. Gloucester and 2s. 2d. Cheltenham. Quarterly payments of 15s. 0d. were made to 'Cooke for clock-winding'; 1s. 0d. to Beetham and Clarke for prescription; haircuts for the 'girls' at 1s. 0d. per head. Visits to the opera at 1s. 6d. each for performances of Yeoman of the Guard; Ruddigore; and Iolanthe. Visits to the cinema in Stroud were made some at 1s. 9d., some at 2s. 3d. per seat. A wireless licence was £1 (October 1950) and a television licence £2 (April 1951).

The Goods Received book commenced 5 April 1950 until 11 February 1955 during which period some goods were obtained locally but mostly from the Hortham-Brentry unit. There were regular weekly payments to Painswick Bakery; Burton's Stores; Co-operative Stores; Gloucestershire Dairy; Tidmarsh's; Valley Fish Supply; Maypole; and H. L. Ireland. Regular but less frequent payments were made to Stroud District Water Board; South West Gas Board; Midlands Electricity Board; R. H. Cooke; Horne's Garage; and J. W. Gooddard. The prices of some goods supplied make astonishing reading today:—

Groceries	— sultanas 1s. 10½d. lb; currants 8¾d. lb; tea 4s. 2½d. lb; ground coffee 5s. 2d. lb; margarine 1s. 0¼d. lb; butter 3s. 4d. lb; corn flakes 1s. 1½d. pkt.; orange squash 1s. 8d.; bacon 2s. 6d. lb.
Vegetables	— potatoes 15s. 0d. cwt; carrots 10s. 0d. cwt; onions 14s. cwt; swedes 20s. cwt.
Fruit	— bananas 1s. lb; oranges 2¼d. each; dessert apples 1s. lb.
Clothing	— overcoats 56s. 1d. each; cardigans 9s. 6d. each; stockings 31s. 11d. per doz.; knickers 43s. 6d. per doz.
Stationery	— 50 sheets of typing paper 9d.; 30 sheets of foolscap 1s. 0d.; sellotape 2s. 3d. per roll.

Some of the 'girls' were hired out for general domestic duties. A few 'lived-out' for some six months, on licence, but the Girls Wages book records those hired out on an hourly basis — usually 1s. 6d. an hour. Regular employers included Miss Gibbs; Mrs. Marsland; Miss Gere; Mrs. Usher; Miss Leighton; Miss Bloxam; the Court House; Sheephouse; and Paradise House. The 'girls' concerned appeared to receive 5s. per week extra pocket money. The period covered by this book was 17 November 1951 to November 1955.

### ASSESSMENTS OF ANOTHER AGE

Only patients categorised as feeble minded — in parlance of the time — were admitted to St. Mary's. The categorisation of mentally defective persons came about following a Royal Commission at the beginning of the present century leading to the **Mental Deficiency Act 1913**. Patients were categorised as - idiot; imbecile; feeble-minded or moral imbecile, according to definitions given in the Act. Between the extremes of these categories, the divisions were artificial and arbitrary. Numerous attempts were made over the years, by a number of people, to devise assessment tests for patients that would determine the category into which they fell. The various testing systems — named after their authors, Binet and Simon, Teman and others — were each used for a period, then discarded in favour of another. Usually, however, an idiot had an IQ below 50; an imbecile between 50 and 70; feeble-minded between 70 and 100.

Some of the notes taken down during assessments however make interesting reading today. One patient from Wolverhampton could not say what county it was in. She thought that London was near Birmingham, but smaller than Birmingham; that the King of England lived in Birmingham, but did not think that the King (King George V at the time) wore a beard; and that France was in England. Another, at age 16, recognised eight coins and knew simple values but said that there were two sixpence in a 2s. piece; that there were 26 pennies in 2s. 6d. She knew the days of the week, but when asked how many days there are in six weeks, answered 'seven'. A further patient could not write letters of the alphabet; said that 4d. from 9d. left 10d.; and that coal is not like wood because coal will burn whilst wood will not.

We have to bear in mind that in the past it was far easier to have a person certified. In many instances of certification, a child had been rejected by the mother, or abandoned. One patient who came to St. Mary's was illegitimate, born of a gipsy mother in a van at Oxford, and abandoned. Often it was a way to hide an unwanted

pregnancy. One 16 year old girl that came to the Home had been put on a train to Stroud by her family and that had been the last time that she ever saw them. She was not met at Stroud and with no money had to walk to Painswick and arrived in a very distressed state. Her only defect was that she was stone deaf.

Most of St. Mary's patients were assessed to have manner and intelligence of a much younger person with limited powers of concentration. Some patients were co-operative and were willing to work — others remained sulky and disobedient, lazy or deceitful. A very strict management regime had to be maintained to control in order to cope with all types. It was not very long ago that the Superintendent insisted that he should be called "sir", or "Mr. ....".

### HOME TODAY

This is a very far cry from the homely atmosphere of today, where the approach is a more enlightened one; where first names are the order of the day, and where patients are now 'residents'. Although IQ tests are still included in tests to ascertain the level of mental ability, they are directed so as to positively assist residents to build and develop skills that they possess. Residents are encouraged to attend classes at Adult Training Centres nearby, where painting, pottery, embroidery or rugmaking tuition is available. Within St. Mary's there is a popular gardening club and a knitting circle. The accent, however, is very much upon the resident's own choice. Numerous outings and visits are arranged for residents, and all enjoy a holiday away — this year it was to Swanage. The health of the residents is well looked after by a local doctor; other social contacts outside the Home are encouraged.

Many of St. Mary's residents stay for long periods and the present group therefore tend to be elderly. The longest staying resident at present at St. Mary's has been there since 1956, and is now aged 87, and as she says 'I would not like to live anywhere else'. This view appears to be reflected by many other residents of St. Mary's.