

# **A HISTORY OF BOOTHAM PARK HOSPITAL**

**and the story behind its sudden closure.**

**A talk to FFH by Ann Weerakoon on 17 February 2024**

In 1772 The Archbishop of York called a meeting of 24 Gentlemen of the three Ridings of York. The purpose of which was to build an asylum to prevent the mentally ill from being incarcerated in prisons or kept in other unlicensed and unsupervised premises and without appropriate care. At the time there were only four asylums in the country.

Money was raised by public subscription and the names of the 600 donors was later inscribed on the walls of the Board Room. But due to deterioration they were in 1886 transcribed on to the oak panels. Such luminary's as William Wilberforce had contributed with an average donation of 20 Guineas (a not inconsiderable sum in those days). Building began in 1774.

The notable architect John Carr was commissioned to design the hospital and did so in the manner of a grand country house in the Palladian style. The splendid facade and interior is a testament to our forebears who clearly believed that people with mental health problems need not be shut away in utilitarian buildings but should have what is beautiful and best.

The hospital was originally named York Lunatic Asylum. This was changed to Bootham Park Hospital in 1904. At inception it promised to provide more humane treatment for the mentally ill of moderate circumstances. Finance was from charitable donation and from fee paying patients. The catchment area was mainly from the county of Yorkshire but on occasion patients were admitted from further afield.

The original plan was to accommodate 54 patients with facilities described as commodious yet secure for the reception of lunatics.

Building was delayed due to money shortages but took its first patients in 1777 under the care of Dr A Hunter.

By 1778 the hospital was over subscribed so a further twenty rooms were added.

Sadly the promise of humane treatment was not adhered to and in the early 1800's it gained notoriety for its failure in this regard. The case of the ill treatment of a particular Quaker woman Hannah Mills, led to the foundation of The Retreat Hospital.

In 1815 reforms were put in place and the hospital became a flourishing and respected institution and was one of a small group of Registered Hospitals under the Lunacy Act of 1845. Apart from charitable donations it took patients housed and graded by their ability to pay. Between 1861 and 1906 it contracted to take pauper patients who were rate aided by the City Corporation. The different classes of patients were strictly segregated with accommodation being graded from Comfortable to opulent. In 1906 pauper patients were moved to the newly built York City Asylum later named Naburn Hospital. (Closed in 1988)

As previously mentioned, the notable architect John Carr was commissioned to design the building. He was responsible for a number of Iconic buildings for example Fairfax House in York, Harewood House near Leeds and Constable Burton Hall in Wensleydale. The Hospital could well have been mistaken for a mansion having an imposing facade and set in park land. The exterior of the original building had small circular turret with a central dome. Both were removed between 1939 and 1951.

Between 1815 and 1853 more land was acquired including two farms, one on Haxby Road and one on Stockton Lane. The Seven Acre field to the front of the hospital and fields to the rear (which is now the site of York District Hospital) were added to the estate with the intention of preventing the erection of unrelated buildings, and therefore to create a calm and relaxing space for patients and to provide opportunities for patients to work by growing farm and garden produce for the hospital.

No expense was spared on the interior of the building which has beautiful stained glass and ornate plasterwork. The Magnificent Minton Tiled corridors were added in 1880's. In 1877 The Recreation Hall was decorated in the style of a Baronial Hall with carved panelling in the style of the Italian Renaissance an oak floor was added in 1928.

The entrance Hall was remodelled in 1880's and photographs show the care and detail of the design. William Walker who was Chairman at the time led this and his portrait was hanging in the corridor at the time of the hospitals closure.

In 1883 to 1931 the fields at the rear were leased to the Yorkshire Gentlemen's Cricket Club and in 1909 and another field was leased to Archbishop Holgate School. In 1928 land was leased to York Corporation for use as a school sports ground and children's play area.

Between 1859 and 1923 the Yorkshire Gala and Flower Show were held on parkland to the front of the hospital it was also used for military drills during the First World War. Between 1913 and 1920 houses on one side of Union Terrace were bought to accommodate nursing staff. The land on Stockton Lane and Haxby Road was sold in 1925 and 1931 respectively.

Originally there were detached buildings behind the main block one of which was destroyed by fire in which several patients and staff perished. This building was replaced in 1817 by the long wing which runs to the rear of the building it housed female patients and the front was used for males. In 1850 a map of the building shows these blocks connected in 1820's by corridors to wards for the accommodation of respectable patients with additional accommodation for refractory patients. There were further wings added to the main building between 1850 and 1900. These were built for male and female paupers. In 1862 -64 a chapel was built in the grounds and the Superintendents House was erected. In 1908 there was further accommodation built which linked to the Superintendents house and was for the use of high fee paying patients.

In the early years of BPH conditions were extremely unpleasant and remained so until 1815 when new Governors instigated reforms to facilities and care. At this point Wards were upgraded and were lavishly decorated with pictures, statuettes, plants, flowers, goldfish and caged singing birds. There were leisure facilities which included A billiard room, card tables, pianos and books.

Gas lighting was installed in 1830 and mains water, water closets and enamel baths. in 1840. In 1863 gas cookers were placed in the kitchens and in 1879 a telephone system from the asylum to the Superintendents house. Heating and cooking systems were regularly upgraded.

BPH remained a small hospital having about 100 fee paying patients offering superior treatment and accommodation for the middle classes. This contrasted with the large County Asylums which were usually fairly remote being set outside cities. From the description given I hope you will appreciate that BPH engaged with the city of York and therefore helped to reduce the fear and stigma of mental illness.

In 1948 BPH became part of the NHS and was the Headquarters for NHS provision in York under the A-Group Hospital Management Committee with services being joined with acute hospitals. The group managed acute and mental health services. In 1952 it was amalgamated with Naburn Hospital though each retained their separate sites.

Over the years BPH has made many adaptations in response to the changing needs of patients and society. The introduction of specific medications and treatment have made it possible to reduce the numbers of patients requiring in-patient care. However at this time there are people who still require sanctuary or asylum and one could question whether the wholesale reduction of hospital beds meets their needs.

The John Carr part of BPH 1773 -1777, the separate building 1788-96 and the 1817 range by Watson and Pritchett and the 1886 by Fisher and Hepper and the extension of 1908 by Alfred Creer are listed as Grade one. Later additions are Grade two. However even the grade two part of the building were built to a high standard with a level of quality and craftsmanship which could be likened to a hotel rather than a hospital.

In 1858 - 1874 Dr Frederick Needham was appointed Medical Superintendent. He changed the perception of the asylum from a prison to a curative hospital. In 1884 the new Medical Superintendent Dr Hitchcock introduced further innovations by reducing the use of sedatives and pioneered therapy for patients with acute mania. In 1909 two visiting American Drs described BPH as the most progressive institution in Europe.

From this brief history I hope you will see the important role BPH has played in improving psychiatric care. The beauty of the building was a statement in itself.

Now one of York's most beautiful buildings stands empty and unloved. I will now move on to how this happened.

In late September 2015 following a visit from the Care Quality Commission BPH was declared unsafe and unfit for purpose. 5 days notice was given to close the site and on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2015 the hospital was closed.

At the same time after a somewhat acrimonious bidding war Tees Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust replaced Leeds and York NHS Partnership Trust.

A report commissioned by CYC ordered an independent report by John Ransford.

He found:

- 1). The Vale of York Clinical Commissioning Group had failed to properly manage the situation
- 2). Leeds and York NHS Foundation Trust had failed to take appropriate responsibility for the building.
- 3). NHS Property Services had failed to understand the challenges of upgrading the building despite 2.7 million being spent by Leeds.
- 4). The CQC failed to give sufficient attention to the need for formal registration and de-registration which would be triggered by the transfer and closure.

It is worthy of note that Leeds Partnership Trust who were responsible for a multi million pound contract to upgrade BPH, failed to ensure necessary work had been completed. Had this been done the closure may well have been avoided. They admitted to being aware of the delays to the planned work and admitted their failure to take action.

It stretches belief that the CQC who had been tasked to visit by Leeds undertook their inspection with an open mind particularly as NHS Property Services had already declared BPH surplus to requirements.

The report referenced ligature points. I can assure you that it is impossible to totally eradicate all ligature points in any building but great thought and every care was concentrated on this issue and BPH was recognised as one of the safest hospitals in the

country. Further the report referred to water temperature. Heating and water was provided centrally by YH and thus was not able to be modified on the BPH site.

It was interesting to note that the CQC referred to insufficient staffing levels. However in their report of February 2014 they reported that the required staffing levels had been adequate and there was no evidence to support any subsequent haemorrhaging of staff.

Great play was made in the media about the poor condition of the building citing that during the visit it was so bad that a piece of plaster had fallen from a ceiling on one of the inspectors. The truth was that there had been water ingress to a ceiling in a back corridor and work was being undertaken to repair it. The area was cordoned off and despite being asked to take an alternative route one of the party did not take heed of the warning. Hence some plaster dust fell on the inspector. Any building requires maintenance and this episode was evidence that this was regularly undertaken.

Most importantly, the report stated that the patients who were seen by the inspectors reported satisfaction in every area regarding their care.

I will leave you to decide whether in those circumstances closing a hospital with five days notice was reasonable. Where was the Care and Quality in that decision? Patients were either precipitately discharged to already overstretched community services or transferred to hospitals many miles from their homes.

It was not until 2016 that an interim service was provided at Peppermill Court for acute inpatient care though it must be noted that this meant the displacement of a specialist service for older people with challenging behaviour. Don't ask me if this this service was re-provided because I don't know. Similarly York lost its Mother and Baby Unit. When asked about this the answer given was there were no referrals. Well there wouldn't be as providers were informed it was closed. What contempt for the community does that reply illustrate?

The Commissioner for police expressed concern at the closure of the Section 136 suite though this may have been reinstated she reports that 40% of police time is regularly taken by people with psychiatric problems.

Both MP's for York, Julian Sturdy and Rachael Maskell raised their concerns regarding the closure of BPH in the House of Commons and with the ministers. Thousands of signatures were given by the public protesting the closure. Despite promises by Colin Martin, Chief Executive of Tees Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Trust and NHS Property Services to engage with the community, to my knowledge this never happened. Certainly at one point CYC expressed concern that NHS Property Services were difficult to engage.

The loss of so many services in York remains a matter of concern. BPH Provided in-patient care and out-patient appointments with medical and specialist nursing staff in addition there was a Day Hospital which provided support to service users who were living in the community.

However there is no hope for reinstatement of BPH. Foss Park is said to be a suitable replacement. I was bemused that it was claimed that the architecture of this building was a reflection of the history of York. I suppose that is a matter of taste but that claim is lost on me. We will never know if like BPH will still be standing and providing care in 200 years but I very much doubt it.

A report from York Civic Trust concluded that BPH and its extensive and open grounds are of the greatest importance within the environment of the City of York. The buildings and their setting are of exceptional architectural and historic interest within the national context and have high significance within the local realm. The future of BPH deserves the highest level of consideration from NHS Property Services and TEWV NHS Trust.

I worked in MH services for 42 years the last 10 were as Matron of Acute in-patient care. I also had responsibility to liaise with facilities to ensure maintenance of the building and I can assure you that this was done. Staff really cared about BPH and I am proud of the care they delivered to patients and the affection and respect they had for working in such an historic and beautiful building which was part of the heritage of MH services and of the history of the City of York.

On 2.2.2023 Early Retirement Living did gain planning permission to buy but decided not to proceed. They intended to demolish the mainly Victorian Grade Two listed part of the

building and surround what was left with totally unsympathetic Lego land type buildings which were to be Care homes or as I see it places to warehouse the elderly for profit.

My friends and I, who have been campaigning since 2015 to maintain BPH as an important part of the history of psychiatry in York and of one of the City's most important buildings, attended the planning committee meeting at which the future of BPH was to be decided. We addressed the meeting and sadly our predictions as to the outcome were correct. I have to say that I have seen more in-depth discussion take place regarding allowing an extension to an average semi than was taken over the loss of one of York's most historic buildings. Only the three Labour members voted against ERL's application and I wish to thank Cllrs Pavlovich, Lomas and Kilbane for their support. So permission was granted. As far as I could ascertain this was given without even a site visit. I do wonder what went before for such an important decision to be taken so precipitately.

Now BPH stands forlorn and neglected. What will the future hold for this iconic building? The concern is that at some future date a builder or entrepreneur will buy it for a song and declare it unsafe with the only option being demolition.

What can we do to stop this happening? As it stands we must rely upon organisations such as the Civic Trust, Historic England The Georgian Society so if you are a member of any of these or any other organisation please let your voice be heard.

One last thing despite much effort my colleagues and I have failed to find out what has happened to the paintings, clocks and other antiques which belong to BPH and were in place at the time of closure. These artefacts were gifts to the building and we would contend belong to the people of York. We have repeatedly asked the question and suggested that they be housed in suitable places to which the public have access.

Thank you for your attendance today and please take a look at the information displayed. I would be happy to try and answer any questions you may have. Further information about BPH can be found on the internet.