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**The impact of the Denbigh Asylum on the welfare of mentally ill paupers in  
nineteenth-century North Wales.**

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7536 words

*This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my wonderful Nanna who supported  
and encouraged me throughout my years at The Open University.*

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## Introduction

This dissertation examines the impact of the Denbigh Asylum on the welfare of mentally ill paupers in North Wales in the nineteenth century. It will not seek to explore the politics behind its introduction. Instead, it will critically assess the extent to which it was beneficial to the wellbeing of those it purported to aid. First, it is important to define what was meant by the term 'mentally ill' in nineteenth century Wales, as the terms used are not defined in the same way today. Typically, mental illness was separated into two categories, the 'idiot' and the 'lunatic'. According to the National Archives, 'Idiots' were described as "natural fools from birth".<sup>1</sup> A 'lunatic' was characterised as an individual who was "sometimes of good and sound memory and understanding and sometimes not".<sup>2</sup>

Prior to the establishment of the Denbigh Asylum there were no asylums in North Wales. The care of 'idiots' and 'lunatics' was largely provided for within the local community, usually by their family members. Hirst and Michael illustrate how, "Female relatives were particularly prominent in caring".<sup>3</sup> The pauper insane could also be sent to workhouses or left to roam the local landscape with little or no support. On occasion, if a pauper was determined to be sufficiently dangerous or unwell, they could be sent to an English asylum. Although, as Michael confirmed, this would be "resisted except

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<sup>1</sup> The National Archives, *Asylums, psychiatric hospitals and mental health* [n. d.]. Available at <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/mental-health/>. Accessed 9 May 2021.

<sup>2</sup> National Archives, *Asylums, psychiatric hospitals etc.*

<sup>3</sup> David Hirst and Pamela Michael, 'Family, Community and the 'Idiot' in Mid-nineteenth Century North Wales' in *Disability & Society*, Vol 18, No. 2 (2003), p.161

in the most dire of circumstances”<sup>4</sup> due to factors such as cost and the language barrier. Denbigh Asylum was regarded as unique when it opened, as it was the first Welsh speaking asylum, allowing patients to communicate in their own language.

This dissertation will explore what life was like for mentally ill paupers prior to the introduction of Denbigh Asylum and within it, in order to conclude whether the introduction of the asylum had a positive impact on the welfare of the mentally ill pauper. The following key aspects of a pauper’s life will be considered: accommodation, nutrition and clothing, employment, language, religion, care and treatment, and rehabilitation.

When examining the historiography of mental health in the nineteenth century Michael explains “there has been little historical coverage of the topic of Wales”.<sup>5</sup> Whilst there are extensive studies of mental health in nineteenth-century England,<sup>6</sup> Wales appears to have been a neglected area. Therefore, in order to gain a good understanding of the situation in North Wales it is important to reflect on the historiography of both Wales and in a wider context Britain.

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<sup>4</sup> Pamela Michael, *Care and treatment of the mentally ill in North Wales, 1800 – 2000*, (Cardiff, 2003), p.10

<sup>5</sup> Michael, *Care and treatment of the mentally ill in North Wales, 1800 – 2000*, p.8

<sup>6</sup> For more information on Mental Health in England see: Roy, Porter, *Mind-forg’d manacles: a history of madness in England from the Restoration to the Regency*, (London, 1987). Rushton, Peter, ‘Lunatics and idiots: Mental disability, the community, and the poor law in North-East England, 1600 – 1800, *Medical history*, Vol. 32 (1988), Issue 1, pp.34-50. Available at: <https://www-cambridge-org.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/core/journals/medical-history/article/lunatics-and-idiots-mental-disability-the-community-and-the-poor-law-in-northeast-england-16001800/1910F8AB1CB31381949B6B0C2DC7E812#article>. Accessed 16 May 2021. Peter, Bartlett, ‘The Asylum, the Workhouse, and the Voice of the Insane Poor in 19th-Century England’, *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, Vol. 21 (1998), No. 4 pp.421-432. Available at: [https://pmt-eu.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/f/gvehrt/TN\\_cdi\\_proquest\\_miscellaneous\\_69113583](https://pmt-eu.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/f/gvehrt/TN_cdi_proquest_miscellaneous_69113583). Accessed 16 May 2021. Smith, Leonard, *Cure, Comfort and Safe Custody: Public Lunatic Asylums in Early Nineteenth-Century England*, (London, 1999)

Hirst and Michael provide a wealth of information in relation to mental health provision in the community for both 'lunatics' and 'idiots' through their works: *Family, community and the 'lunatic' in mid-nineteenth century North Wales* and *Family, community and the 'idiot' in mid-nineteenth century North Wales*. These articles studied both 'idiots' and 'lunatics' in isolation. However, they adopted a similar approach through their utilisation of the Lunacy Returns to explore what life was like. Whilst this approach allowed Hirst and Michael to focus on specific details relating to both categories of mental illness, it could be argued that it led to a certain amount of repetition in their work. The use of the Lunacy Returns could also be seen as problematic. These are incomplete records and "the approach adopted was to link records...considered to relate to the same person"<sup>7</sup> which could prove difficult when noting individuals often had similar names. Hirst and Michael surmise that being cared for within the community "was a varied experience for people"<sup>8</sup> and that the treatment of certain cases "gave ammunition for the Lunacy Commissioners on their visit in 1844".<sup>9</sup> They conclude that "most lunatics in North Wales lived in their own communities".<sup>10</sup> However many were committed to an asylum "following the breakdown of long-standing family arrangements for care".<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> David Hirst and Pamela Michael, 'Family, Community and the 'lunatic' in Mid-nineteenth Century North Wales' in *Outside the Walls of the Asylum: The History of Care in the Community 1750 – 2000* by Peter Bartlett and David Wright (Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 1999), p.68

<sup>8</sup> Hirst and Michael, 'Family, Community and the 'Idiot' in Mid-nineteenth Century North Wales, p.161

<sup>9</sup> Hirst and Michael, 'Family, Community and the 'Idiot' in Mid-nineteenth Century North Wales, p.161

<sup>10</sup> Hirst and Michael, 'Family, Community and the 'lunatic' in Mid-nineteenth Century North Wales, p.84

<sup>11</sup> Hirst and Michael, 'Family, Community and the 'lunatic' in Mid-nineteenth Century North Wales, p.84

Another article by David Hirst and Pamela Michael, *Establishing the 'rule of kindness: The foundation of the North Wales Lunatic Asylum Denbigh*, is a useful piece of secondary scholarship that investigates the foundation of the Denbigh Asylum and the attitudes that underpinned it. Specifically, that the “operational philosophy of the asylum was based on the rule of kindness”.<sup>12</sup> When considering this in relation to the question of the welfare of those with mental illness, the article explains “as patients were admitted to the asylum, it became evident that amongst them were some who had suffered years of neglect and ill-treatment”.<sup>13</sup> Thus concluding that committal to an asylum could have a positive impact on the welfare of a mentally ill pauper.

In *Lunatics, Imbeciles and Idiots. A History of Insanity in Nineteenth-Century Britain and Ireland*, Kathryn Burtinshaw and Dr John Burt explore insanity in Britain and Ireland. They claim “individuals who were considered insane or mentally deficient were often treated in an appalling way with little or no thought to their likely recovery”.<sup>14</sup> They go on to argue a “new belief was that asylums were required as ‘institutions for the shelter and support of afflicted or destitute persons, in particular...the insane’”.<sup>15</sup> Burtinshaw and Burt clarified that institutions such as asylums had undergone a transformation “Squalid, dirty and prison like conditions were abandoned and curative accommodation in hospital like surroundings were provided”.<sup>16</sup> This supports the

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<sup>12</sup> David Hirst and Pamela Michael, ‘Establishing the ‘Rule of Kindness’: The foundation of the North Wales Lunatic Asylum, Denbigh’ in *Insanity, Institutions and Society, 1800 – 1914*, Joseph Melling and Bill Forsythe eds. (Taylor and Francis Group, 1999), p.171

<sup>13</sup> Hirst and Michael, ‘Establishing the ‘Rule of Kindness’: The foundation of the North Wales Lunatic Asylum, Denbigh’, p.171

<sup>14</sup> Kathryn Burtinshaw and Dr John Burt, *Lunatics, Imbeciles and Idiots. A History of Insanity in Nineteenth Century Britain and Ireland*, (Pen and Sword History, 2017), p.6

<sup>15</sup> Burtinshaw and Burt, *Lunatics, Imbeciles and Idiots. A History of Insanity in Nineteenth Century Britain and Ireland*, p.6

<sup>16</sup> Burtinshaw and Burt, *Lunatics, Imbeciles and Idiots. A History of Insanity in Nineteenth Century Britain and Ireland*, p. 7

argument that asylums in Britain should be viewed a positive light in relation to the welfare of a patient.

In *Getting out of the Asylum: Understanding the Confinement of the Insane in the Nineteenth Century*, David Wright points out that “there emerged a lunacy reform movement based on the premise that madness could be cured given proper institutional treatment”.<sup>17</sup> This suggests that asylums could be beneficial to the treatment of the mentally ill. However, Wright goes on to suggest that “judged even by the standards of its proponents, these new institutions proved to be a disaster”<sup>18</sup> citing issues such as overcrowding. It should be noted though, that Wright does not discuss the experiences of the mentally ill inside or outside of asylums, focusing instead on the reasons behind their residency arguing “the confinement of the insane can be seen...as a pragmatic response of households to the stresses of industrialization”.<sup>19</sup> This dissertation will not seek to explore the motives behind those placing the pauper insane within asylums. Instead, focus will be given to whether this institutionalisation was beneficial to mentally ill paupers.

Michael explores life before Denbigh Asylum and then more extensively within its walls in *Care and Treatment of the Mentally Ill in North Wales 1800 – 2000*. She explains that although her “account of the history of the North Wales Asylum may be critical of

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<sup>17</sup> David, Wright, *Getting Out of the Asylum: Understanding the Confinement of the Insane in the Nineteenth Century*, *Social History of Medicine*, Vol 10, Issue 1 (1997), pp. 137-155. Available at: <https://doi-org.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/10.1093/shm/10.1.137>. Accessed 11 May 2021, p.138

<sup>18</sup> Wright, *Getting Out of the Asylum: Understanding the Confinement of the Insane in the Nineteenth Century*, p.138

<sup>19</sup> Wright, *Getting Out of the Asylum: Understanding the Confinement of the Insane in the Nineteenth Century*, p.139

some aspects of institutional care, there is nonetheless an implicit assumption that, on the whole, the primary goal of the institution was to relieve the suffering of its patients”.<sup>20</sup> This dissertation will seek to clarify whether this goal was achieved and whether the asylum could be considered to have benefitted those that graced its halls. In Lanzoni’s article *The Asylum in Context: An Essay Review* she analyses Michael’s work surmising that Michael “takes an unabashed perspective of support for the founders and medical professionals of the North Wales Lunatic Asylum”.<sup>21</sup> Lanzoni also highlights that historiography of asylums “remain, in great part, written from the perspectives other than that of the patient”.<sup>22</sup> This dissertation will use various sources to gain a greater understanding of the patient experience.

The first chapter of the dissertation will place focus on the lives of mentally ill paupers prior to the opening of Denbigh Asylum. It will utilise primary sources including the *Supplemental Report of Metropolitan Commissioners in Lunacy: Relative to the general condition of the insane in Wales*<sup>23</sup> (henceforth referred to as *Supplemental Report*) and secondary scholarship to develop an understanding of how: accommodation, nutrition and clothing, employment, language, religion, care and treatment, and rehabilitation impacted their overall welfare.

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<sup>20</sup> Michael, *Care and treatment of the mentally ill in North Wales, 1800 – 2000*, p.2

<sup>21</sup>PH.D. Susan, Lanzoni, *The Asylum in Context: An Essay Review*, *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, Vol 60, Issue 4 (2005), pp.499-505. Available at: <https://doi-org.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/10.1093/jhmas/jri070>. Accessed on 12 May 2021, p.503

<sup>22</sup> PH.D. Susan, Lanzoni, *The Asylum in Context: An Essay Review*, p.505

<sup>23</sup> Commissioners in Lunacy, *Supplemental Report of the Metropolitan Commissioners in Lunacy Relative to the General Condition of the Insane in Wales*, 1844 (London, 1844). Available at: <https://parlipapers-proquest-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/parlipapers/result/pgpdocumentview?accountid=14697&groupid=95579&pgId=708e7711-56cd-42ee-b1fb-d8ae0ffef5cc&rsId=17773F70D47#0>, Accessed 6 May 2021.

The second chapter will centre around life within the asylum; seeking to draw comparisons with the previous chapter when reflecting on what life was like and the extent to which the changes in: accommodation, nutrition and clothing, employment, language, religion, care and treatment, and rehabilitation impacted the overall welfare of mentally ill paupers. Annual Reports of the North Wales Lunatic Asylum will be studied alongside newspaper articles and Reports of the Commissioners in Lunacy to develop a picture of the standard of welfare within the asylum and compare it to life outside. The dissertation will conclude that overall, the introduction of the Denbigh Asylum had a positive impact on the welfare of mentally ill paupers in nineteenth-century North Wales.

## Chapter 1: Before Denbigh Asylum

This chapter will examine several aspects of life in nineteenth century North Wales to determine what the standard of welfare was like for mentally ill paupers before the introduction of Denbigh Asylum. It will consider: accommodation, nutrition and clothing, employment, language, religion, care and treatment, and rehabilitation. There will be an exploration of various primary and secondary source material including the *Supplemental Report*.<sup>24</sup> This report was produced in 1844 by the Metropolitan Lunacy Commissioners and it provides a plethora of information regarding the lives of the pauper insane. However, as pointed out by Michael, the *Supplemental Report* must be recognised to potentially have “a built-in bias towards highlighting problem cases and emphasising the deficiencies of the system”.<sup>25</sup> With this in mind, the report will be critically examined alongside other primary sources such as newspaper articles, parliamentary acts and secondary scholarship, to develop an understanding of a pauper ‘idiot’ and ‘lunatic’s’ life in nineteenth century North Wales.

When considering what the standard of welfare was like for a pauper ‘idiot’ or ‘lunatic’, a fundamental factor was accommodation. The *Supplemental Report* provides an overview of accommodation arrangements for the insane across several locations within North Wales. The report confirms “out of 207 Lunatics and Idiots, belonging to seven Unions, nine only were in Asylums, twenty-four in Workhouses, and 174

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<sup>24</sup> Commissioners in Lunacy, *Supplemental Report of the Metropolitan Commissioners in Lunacy Relative to the General Condition of the Insane in Wales*

<sup>25</sup> Michael, *Care and treatment of the mentally ill in North Wales, 1800 – 2000*, p.21

boarded out...with their friends and elsewhere.”<sup>26</sup>. Starting with those in asylums, it is important to note that generally a ‘lunatic’ or ‘idiot’ would need to be determined as sufficiently dangerous before any thought would be given to an asylum and even then, as a last resort. The financial costs made overseers reluctant to send “even the most unruly to asylums”.<sup>27</sup> In the early nineteenth-century if an insane pauper was to be sent to an asylum from North Wales, it would be an asylum located in England. For those paupers residing in North Wales this would usually be Haydock Lodge. Whilst this dissertation will not explore the failings of Haydock Lodge,<sup>28</sup> it was noted in Hirst’s *A ticklish sort of affair* that these failings “reinforced the arguments for the expansion of the public asylum”<sup>29</sup> within North Wales. When reflecting on the welfare of a pauper ‘lunatic’ admitted to an English Asylum, it would be fair to conclude that being confined to an institution far away from home, with little or no communication in their native tongue would have been detrimental to their wellbeing.

On occasion the pauper insane could also be sent to workhouses; however, as the figures from the *Supplemental Report* show, this was a small minority. This may have been in part due to the *Poor Law Amendment Act 1834* which made it clear that any insane individuals surmised as dangerous should not be held within a workhouse “for any longer Period than Fourteen Days”.<sup>30</sup> When considering the lives of those housed

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<sup>26</sup> Commissioners in Lunacy, *Supplemental Report of the Metropolitan Commissioners in Lunacy Relative to the General Condition of the Insane in Wales*, pp.10-11

<sup>27</sup> Hirst and Michael, Family, Community and the ‘lunatic’ in Mid-nineteenth Century North Wales, p.81

<sup>28</sup> For more information about the scandal of Haydock Lodge see: David Hirst, ‘A ticklish sort of affair’: Charles Mott, Haydock Lodge and the economics of asylumdom in *History of Psychiatry*, Vol 16, No. 3 (2005) and Anon. *The Haydock Lodge Lunatic Asylum, 1846*, (Hansard, 1846) Available at: <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1846/aug/26/the-haydock-lodge-lunatic-asylum>, Accessed on 6 May 2021

<sup>29</sup> Hirst, ‘A ticklish sort of affair’: Charles Mott, Haydock Lodge and the economics of asylumdom, p.328

<sup>30</sup> *Poor Law Amendment Act 1834: An Act for the Amendment and better Administration of the Laws relating to the Poor in England and Wales* (4 & 5 Will. 4, C A P. LXXVI)

within workhouses, the *Supplemental Report* provides an example in the form of Richard Parry, an “Epileptic and decidedly Insane”.<sup>31</sup> It is detailed that “Since he has been in the Workhouse, and kept upon a low diet, he has been employed, and generally harmless.”.<sup>32</sup> This small section of the report provides a snapshot of the type of treatment a pauper may receive through housing, nutrition and employment within a workhouse. Michael substantiates the claims within the report, stating life within a workhouse was “strict and repressive, orderly and regulated”,<sup>33</sup> explaining that “Into this inappropriate environment an increasing number of imbeciles, idiots and pauper lunatics were placed”.<sup>34</sup> It is clear that a workhouse was not an appropriate location for a mentally ill pauper to be housed and this would have been detrimental to their welfare.

In addition to residing within an asylum or a workhouse it was not unheard of for some pauper ‘idiots’ or ‘lunatics’ to live independently. Michael and Hirst surmise “Some lunatics were living independently...even when considered unsuitable to be in the community”.<sup>35</sup> Living independently could also mean, sadly, paupers were homeless. One such example was John Hughes who “wanders about at all seasons, without a home, begging by day, and sleeping at night in out-houses, or any place of shelter”.<sup>36</sup> If an insane pauper could not stay with family or be given placements, they might face

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<sup>31</sup> Commissioners in Lunacy, *Supplemental Report of the Metropolitan Commissioners in Lunacy Relative to the General Condition of the Insane in Wales*, p.18

<sup>32</sup> Commissioners in Lunacy, *Supplemental Report of the Metropolitan Commissioners in Lunacy Relative to the General Condition of the Insane in Wales*, p.19

<sup>33</sup> Michael, *Care and treatment of the mentally ill in North Wales, 1800 – 2000*, p.13

<sup>34</sup> Michael, *Care and treatment of the mentally ill in North Wales, 1800 – 2000*, p.13

<sup>35</sup> Hirst and Michael, *Family, Community and the ‘lunatic’ in Mid-nineteenth Century North Wales*, p.75

<sup>36</sup> Commissioners in Lunacy, *Supplemental Report of the Metropolitan Commissioners in Lunacy Relative to the General Condition of the Insane in Wales*, p.12

a “lifetime of wandering or begging”.<sup>37</sup> Living independently would often mean a mentally ill pauper received little or no support, this would have negatively impacted their wellbeing, especially when considering the homeless individuals.

As the *Supplemental Report* makes clear, the large majority of pauper ‘idiots’ and ‘lunatics’ were boarded out within the local community. This would mean they had an identified carer. Generally, Michael and Hirst claim “Burden fell overwhelmingly on the parents and particularly the mother”.<sup>38</sup> This is echoed by Sir Andrew Halliday within his report, during his analysis of Anglesey, he concluded “the whole number are taken care of by their relations, being for the most part harmless idiots; and not one is confined in any asylum”.<sup>39</sup>

So, how did accommodation impact the welfare of those mentally ill paupers who were boarded out within the community? Much would depend on a pauper’s personal situation, *The Madhouses Act* of 1774 made clear that “no House...shall be kept for the Reception of more than one Lunatick, unless...licenced”.<sup>40</sup> This meant that those paupers ‘lunatics’ boarded out within the local community should be accommodated separately from other ‘lunatics’. Hirst and Michael also observed that those caring for “lunatics were liable to receive a higher rate”<sup>41</sup> of financial support. The *Supplemental Report* provides a wealth of case studies and it clear that there are significant variables

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<sup>37</sup> Hirst and Michael, ‘Family, Community and the ‘Idiot’ in Mid-nineteenth Century North Wales, p.161

<sup>38</sup> Hirst and Michael, ‘Family, Community and the ‘Idiot’ in Mid-nineteenth Century North Wales, p.152

<sup>39</sup> Andrew Halliday, *A Letter to Lord Robert Seymour with a Report of The Number of Lunatics and Idiots in England and Wales*, (London, 1829), p.59

<sup>40</sup> *Madhouses Act 1774: An Act for regulating Madhouses* (14 Geo.3, CAP. XLIX)

<sup>41</sup> Hirst and Michael, Family, Community and the ‘lunatic’ in Mid-nineteenth Century North Wales, p.75

in individual experiences. One example within the *Supplemental Report* is the case of Edward Lloyd who was described as “Frequently violent and dangerous”,<sup>42</sup> it is explained he had “been confined at night by a belt and muffs, in order to keep him quiet, and for the protection of his family”.<sup>43</sup> Examples like this are also touched on by Hitch in his letter to *The Times* where he noted “some would be deemed unsafe to the public...unless securely chained to the wall or the floor”.<sup>44</sup> For those mentally ill paupers considered dangerous these sources point to conditions that could only be considered as detrimental to their welfare.

The *Supplemental Report* also provides various examples of paupers treated well, for example, Richard Jones was “Boarded with parents....Well-clothed, clean and kindly treated”.<sup>45</sup> Another example, Jane James was “boarded...with sister, who said that her heart would break if she were taken away....Bedding good and clean. House neat and comfortable”.<sup>46</sup> However, there are extensive cases detailing ill treatment. Perhaps the most striking case reported by the *Supplemental Report* was of Mary Jones in Ruthin. The *Supplemental Report* describes that “she had been confined for

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<sup>42</sup> Commissioners in Lunacy, *Supplemental Report of the Metropolitan Commissioners in Lunacy Relative to the General Condition of the Insane in Wales*, p.20

<sup>43</sup> Commissioners in Lunacy, *Supplemental Report of the Metropolitan Commissioners in Lunacy Relative to the General Condition of the Insane in Wales*, p.20

<sup>44</sup> Samuel Hitch, ‘Insanity In Wales’, *The Times*, no. 18103, (1 October 1842) [n.p.]. Available at: [https://go-gale-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Newspapers&resultListType=RESULT\\_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&hitCount=16&searchType=BasicSearchForm&currentPosition=1&docId=GALE%7CCS84833089&docType=Letter+to+the+editor&sort=Pub+Date+Forward+Chron&contentSegment=ZTMA-MOD1&prodId=TTDA&pageNum=1&contentSet=GALE%7CCS84833089&searchId=R1&userGroupName=tou&inPS=true](https://go-gale-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Newspapers&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&hitCount=16&searchType=BasicSearchForm&currentPosition=1&docId=GALE%7CCS84833089&docType=Letter+to+the+editor&sort=Pub+Date+Forward+Chron&contentSegment=ZTMA-MOD1&prodId=TTDA&pageNum=1&contentSet=GALE%7CCS84833089&searchId=R1&userGroupName=tou&inPS=true). Accessed on 10 April 2021.

<sup>45</sup> Commissioners in Lunacy, *Supplemental Report of the Metropolitan Commissioners in Lunacy Relative to the General Condition of the Insane in Wales*, p.24

<sup>46</sup> Commissioners in Lunacy, *Supplemental Report of the Metropolitan Commissioners in Lunacy Relative to the General Condition of the Insane in Wales*, pp.28-29

a period of fifteen years and upwards".<sup>47</sup> She had been held "in a wretched condition, filthy and disgusting".<sup>48</sup>

The ill treatment of the pauper insane was not an unknown occurrence in nineteenth-century North Wales as can be seen in correspondence, authored by Clericus, and published in the *North Wales Chronical*. Clericus details "the painful and cruel mode of treatment to which many of the insane poor are at present subjected".<sup>49</sup> The author then claimed that they had personally witnessed a women held "in a small dark closet, in which she had for some time been chained to a wall".<sup>50</sup> Socially, 'idiots' and 'lunatics' were arguably positioned on the fringes of society and overall, it is clear that the experience and implications on individual welfare of those boarded out could significantly vary depending on their circumstances.

Whilst considering how the pauper insane lived it is important to at look the provisions that were in place for them in relation to food and clothing. Much would depend on the situation of a pauper, if they were housed within a workhouse, for example, they would be fed and clothed according to the provisions within the workhouse. However, for those boarded out within the community, they would depend on those they resided with to provide them with these necessities and what they received would very much depend on the attitudes of those who cared for them. Regarding clothing, the

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<sup>47</sup> Commissioners in Lunacy, *Supplemental Report of the Metropolitan Commissioners in Lunacy Relative to the General Condition of the Insane in Wales*, p.38

<sup>48</sup> Commissioners in Lunacy, *Supplemental Report of the Metropolitan Commissioners in Lunacy Relative to the General Condition of the Insane in Wales*, p.37

<sup>49</sup> Clericus, 'To the Editor of the North Wales Chronicle', *The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality*, no. 796, (25 October 1842) [n.p.] Available at:

<https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4518878/4518881> Accessed on 14 May 2021.

<sup>50</sup> Clericus, 'To the Editor of the North Wales Chronicle'

*Supplemental Report* explains that the “general custom...is for articles of clothing, or small sums for the purpose, to be supplied, in the way of casual relief”.<sup>51</sup> However, as has been evidenced the experiences of the pauper insane varied greatly. With their care insufficiently monitored it is clear many paupers may have been denied their most basic needs, which would have adversely impacted their welfare. Such treatment was identified when inspecting cases such as Mary Jones who, when she was assessed as part of the *Supplemental Report*, was described as “emaciated in the last degree”.<sup>52</sup>

When assessing the welfare of mentally ill paupers, consideration should be given to the implications of any ability to work. Hirst and Michael point out many ‘idiots’ were able to work noting “this ability to work may have been of particular significance for those ‘idiots’ who were boarded out with more distant relatives or in the community”.<sup>53</sup> Aside from the financial and social benefits of working this may have aided the ‘idiots’ in attaining some semblance of normality which could be considered beneficial to their wellbeing. An example of an employed ‘idiot’ is provided in the *Supplemental Report* in the form of Robert Thomas who is described as ““Harmless and employed in a garden”.<sup>54</sup>

When considering language, it is clear that the pauper insane in North Wales predominantly spoke Welsh. A point maintained by Hitch in his Letter to *The Times*:

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<sup>51</sup> Commissioners in Lunacy, *Supplemental Report of the Metropolitan Commissioners in Lunacy Relative to the General Condition of the Insane in Wales*, p.11

<sup>52</sup> Commissioners in Lunacy, *Supplemental Report of the Metropolitan Commissioners in Lunacy Relative to the General Condition of the Insane in Wales*, p.39

<sup>53</sup> Hirst and Michael, ‘Family, Community and the ‘Idiot’ in Mid-nineteenth Century North Wales, p.154

<sup>54</sup> Commissioners in Lunacy, *Supplemental Report of the Metropolitan Commissioners in Lunacy Relative to the General Condition of the Insane in Wales*, p.23

“So few of the lower class of the Welch, except some in towns or in the precincts of the inns, speak English”.<sup>55</sup> For those boarded out within their local community they were able to converse in their local language; however, for those who required institutionalisation within an English asylum this was not the case. The *Supplemental Report* describes a case study of David Abraham, who was sent to Haydock Lodge where he was “quiet and torpid, and had been mute. Upon being questioned...in Welsh, he gave rational answers, and showed a recollect of former occurrences”.<sup>56</sup> This is a clear example of the importance of a mutual language and the ability to communicate to an individual’s wellbeing. Hitch provides further support to this line of argument explaining how an asylum in Denbigh would allow a patient to “communion with his fellow-men; and would enjoy that privilege with which man alone is endowed – the gift of speech and the delights of conversation”.<sup>57</sup> For those placed within English asylums it is clear that their inability to communicate would negatively impact their wellbeing.

Next, it is important to reflect on the significance of religion to a person’s welfare. Religion was a very serious aspect of life in nineteenth century North Wales. The rise of the non-conformist was rife. This can be seen by analysing ‘Table N’ in the Religious Census of 1851, collated some 7 years following the opening of the Denbigh Asylum. The table details the “Number of Persons present at the most numerous attended Services, on Sunday, March 20, 1851”.<sup>58</sup> This provides a snapshot in time of those

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<sup>55</sup> Hitch, ‘Insanity In Wales’

<sup>56</sup> Commissioners in Lunacy, *Supplemental Report of the Metropolitan Commissioners in Lunacy Relative to the General Condition of the Insane in Wales*, pp.26-27

<sup>57</sup> Hitch, ‘Insanity In Wales’

<sup>58</sup> Horace Mann ed. (1854), *Census of Great Britain, 1851: Religious Worship in England and Wales*. (London, 1854), p.142

attending church and details that the population of North Wales was over 400,000. Of those, 39,729 identified as Church of England, 173,543 as Protestant, 762 Roman Catholic and 314 detailed as "Other Bodies".<sup>59</sup> It would be fair to assume that as the insane made up a proportion of the population, they would have made up a similar proportion of the religious denominations. Therefore, it is likely that a large proportion of mentally ill paupers would have been non-conformist. This is a point that will be evidenced when considering the right to religious autonomy and the conflicting institutional imposition of Denbigh Asylum in the following chapter. Within the community both pauper 'idiots' and 'lunatics' were able to enjoy their own religious observance as were those residing within workhouses. It was detailed within the *Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834*: "That no Rules, Orders, or Regulations...shall oblige any Inmate of any Workhouse to attend any Religious Service which may be celebrated in a Mode contrary to the religious principles of such Inmate".<sup>60</sup> This shows a clear consensus to the importance for religious choice to the welfare of an individual.

Having considered the impact of accommodation, nutrition and clothing, employment, language and religion on the day to day lives and welfare of a mentally ill pauper, it is now necessary to assess the impact of the treatment and care available and whether any of this could be regarded as rehabilitative. Falling outside of what was deemed serious enough to be committed to an asylum in England, the *Supplemental Report* establishes that medical care was not widely provided and for many, as a result, their mental health further deteriorated. The report also claims that "in a large proportion of

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<sup>59</sup> Horace Mann ed. (1854), *Census of Great Britain, 1851: Religious Worship in England and Wales*. p.142

<sup>60</sup> *Poor Law Amendment Act 1834: An Act for the Amendment and better Administration of the Laws relating to the Poor in England and Wales* (4 & 5 Will. 4, C A P. LXXVI)

the cases thus submitted to medical treatment in Asylums, the poor creatures have been sent at a late stage of their malady, and in a deplorable condition”.<sup>61</sup>

When analysing the care provided within the community the *Supplemental Report* points out “many are kindly treated and properly taken care of...in nearly all such as to deprive them of the means or probability of cure by proper medical treatment”.<sup>62</sup> This is echoed by Michael who explained the “absence of any madhouse or county asylum, overseers relied....on a small number of specialist doctors”.<sup>63</sup> There clearly appeared to be a pattern of a lack of medical care provided for those with mental illness, even if basic care was provided. Those who did receive medical treatment or care, received it within the walls of an English asylum; however, as evidenced this was frequently too late for any realistic prospect of rehabilitation. There therefore existed a continuous cycle of mental illness with no clear medical treatment or prospect of rehabilitation, and this would have negatively impacted the welfare of mentally ill paupers.

Overall, when examining the standard of welfare for mentally ill paupers in North Wales, prior to the introduction of Denbigh Asylum, it is clear there could be great variation in a pauper’s individual experience and the impact of that experience on their welfare. Some ‘idiots’ were treated kindly by their families and some suffered gross neglect and abuse such as Mary Jones. Some ‘lunatics’ were sent away to English

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<sup>61</sup> Commissioners in Lunacy, *Supplemental Report of the Metropolitan Commissioners in Lunacy Relative to the General Condition of the Insane in Wales*, p.5

<sup>62</sup> Commissioners in Lunacy, *Supplemental Report of the Metropolitan Commissioners in Lunacy Relative to the General Condition of the Insane in Wales*, p.11

<sup>63</sup> Michael, *Care and treatment of the mentally ill in North Wales, 1800 – 2000*, p.10

Asylums, where the language barrier was detrimental to their wellbeing, and some mentally ill paupers were placed in workhouses. Some insane paupers were able to work and most enjoyed religious autonomy which positively impacted their wellbeing. Clearly there was a lack of medical support and treatment with the chance of rehabilitation almost non-existent, mentally ill paupers appeared to be doomed to a life of mental illness with no way for recovering and no chance of a normal, healthy life. But did the introduction of the Denbigh Asylum change this? This is something that the following chapter will explore.

## Chapter 2: Denbigh Asylum

The focus of this chapter is to analyse the impact of Denbigh Asylum on the welfare of mentally ill paupers. It will consider: accommodation, nutrition and clothing, employment, language, religion, care and treatment, and rehabilitation. There will be various sources analysed including asylum reports conducted by the committee of visitors who, as Michael explains “oversaw the conduct of the asylum”.<sup>64</sup> These reports provide a valuable insight into asylum life; however, it must be noted that they may contain a positive bias, as various sections were produced by asylum staff to be presented to those overseeing it. Reports from the Commissioners in Lunacy will also be studied, which could be considered less biased, with a more analytical approach taken. These reports will be examined alongside other primary sources such as newspaper articles and secondary scholarship. In addition, this chapter will draw comparisons to the preceding chapter, to help draw together evidence, to answer the overriding question as to the impact of the Denbigh Asylum on the welfare of mentally ill paupers in nineteenth-century North Wales.

Firstly, it is important to consider what accommodation was available to a pauper patient entering the Denbigh Asylum. Patients were separated, housed by gender and tended to by staff of the same gender. Michael explained that this was “aimed first and foremost at protecting patients from any sexual abuse or impropriety”.<sup>65</sup> Within her article *‘Animal instincts’: the sexual abuse of women with learning difficulties 1830s –*

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<sup>64</sup> Michael, *Care and treatment of the mentally ill in North Wales, 1800 – 2000*, p.56

<sup>65</sup> Michael, *Care and treatment of the mentally ill in North Wales, 1800 – 2000*, p.58

1910s, Joanna Bourke illustrates that “people with learning difficulties were portrayed as both precocious and fecund”<sup>66</sup> and as a result there were sadly numerous instances of “sexual assault and rape”.<sup>67</sup> It is clear that the rules enforced by Denbigh Asylum would have protected the welfare of those at risk of such abuse. In addition to being segregated by gender, Michael suggests that attention was placed towards the patient’s manner and the quiet were separated from the “noisy or dangerous”<sup>68</sup> and those who were “clean...from the dirty patients”.<sup>69</sup> This would have largely benefitted the wellbeing of patients as they would have been in the company of patients with similar sensibilities.

Burtinshaw and Burt confirmed how “Nineteenth century asylums were built with the comfort and safety of patients in mind.”<sup>70</sup> This is evidenced when considering the North Wales Counties Lunatic Asylum reports, where a pattern of wanting to improve the facilities for the benefit of the inhabitants can be seen. One example of this is included within *The Third Annual Report of the North Wales Lunatic Asylum* (henceforth referred to as *The Third Annual Report*) where the need for gas lighting was raised. It was noted lighting in the evenings would create “the most agreeable and cheerful part of the day – as it now is the most dreary”.<sup>71</sup> Michael evidences the need for this lighting confirming “During the early years of operation the asylum was depended solely upon

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<sup>66</sup> Joanna, Burke, ‘Animal instincts’: the sexual abuse of women with learning difficulties, 1830s – 1910s, *Women’s History Review*, Vol 29, Issue 7 (2020). Available at: <https://www-tandfonline-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/doi/full/10.1080/09612025.2020.1805155>. Accessed 14 May 2021, [n.p.]

<sup>67</sup> Joanna, Burke, ‘Animal instincts’: the sexual abuse of women with learning difficulties, 1830s – 1910s, [n.p.]

<sup>68</sup> Michael, *Care and treatment of the mentally ill in North Wales, 1800 – 2000*, p.68

<sup>69</sup> Michael, *Care and treatment of the mentally ill in North Wales, 1800 – 2000*, p.68

<sup>70</sup> Burtinshaw and Burt, *Lunatics, Imbeciles and Idiots. A History of Insanity in Nineteenth Century Britain and Ireland*, p.134

<sup>71</sup> North Wales Counties Lunatic Asylum, *The third annual report of the North Wales Lunatic Asylum, Denbigh: for the year 1851. (Denbigh, 1852)*. Available at: <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/fsrrreem>. Accessed 9 May 2021, p.11

candlelight”.<sup>72</sup> From this it can be seen that great care was taken towards the welfare of mentally ill paupers through their accommodation.

Michael describes that upon arrival at the Asylum care was taken to check patients for “any signs of bruising or sores”.<sup>73</sup> The *First Annual Report of the North Wales Lunatic Asylum* (henceforth referred to as *The First Annual Report*) includes an example of a patient “who was brought into the Asylum manacled so cruelly, that he will bear the marks of the handcuffs while he lives”.<sup>74</sup> The *First Annual Report* goes on to detail that upon his residence in the Asylum “he gradually became confiding and tractable, and he now as harmless as any patient in the house”.<sup>75</sup> Michael and Hirst provide a further example in the form of Mary Lloyd who had been “tied to the bed with a cart-rope”.<sup>76</sup> As can be seen from the examples given the asylum, in some instances, helped break the cycle of neglect and ill-treatment and as a result directly improved the welfare of those it housed.

The medical officer’s report of the *First Annual Report* clarifies that “The law of kindness” has been the rule by which we have essayed to govern. We have assiduously endeavoured to impress...that forbearance, gentleness, and patience,

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<sup>72</sup> Michael, *Care and treatment of the mentally ill in North Wales, 1800 – 2000*, p.62

<sup>73</sup> Michael, *Care and treatment of the mentally ill in North Wales, 1800 – 2000*, p.68

<sup>74</sup> North Wales Counties Lunatic Asylum, *The first annual report of the North Wales Lunatic Asylum, Denbigh: for the year M.DCCC.XLIX* (Denbigh, 1849). Available at: <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/bkzhpysu>. Accessed 9 May 2021, pp.7-8

<sup>75</sup> North Wales Counties Lunatic Asylum, *The first annual report of the North Wales Lunatic Asylum, Denbigh: for the year M.DCCC.XLIX*, pp.7-8

<sup>76</sup> Hirst and Michael, ‘Establishing the ‘Rule of Kindness’: The foundation of the North Wales Lunatic Asylum, Denbigh’, p.171

are essential”.<sup>77</sup> This institutional attitude is reinforced by the *Thirty-Fourth Report of the Commissioners in Lunacy to The Lord Chancellor* (henceforth referred to as the *Thirty-Fourth Report*) which confirmed patients “appeared to us to be treated with great kindness by the officers and attendants, and to be on very friendly terms with them”.<sup>78</sup>

When comparing the living conditions of those within the asylum to the pauper insane who resided within the community, it is important to remember that experiences could widely vary within the community. Within the *First Annual Report* it was confirmed that the Commissioners in Lunacy reported the “building was throughout clean and in excellent order”.<sup>79</sup> Additionally, it was noted within their second visit on 12 November 1849 that, “the day-rooms and bed-rooms were clean, well ventilated, and in good order”.<sup>80</sup> It is therefore clear that those cared for within the asylum received a consistent level of housing and treatment which benefited their wellbeing.

It should be noted that Denbigh Asylum also regularly held events for their patients. One example is detailed in a newspaper article in 1895 reporting on Christmas. The article surmises “every effort was made...to give the season’s joy to the patients”.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> North Wales Counties Lunatic Asylum, *The first annual report of the North Wales Lunatic Asylum, Denbigh: for the year M.DCCC.XLIX*, p.7

<sup>78</sup> Commissioners in Lunacy, *Copy of the Thirty-Fourth Report of the Commissioners in Lunacy to The Lord Chancellor (Presented pursuant to Act of Parliament), 1880* (London, 1880), Available at: <https://parlipapers-proquest-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/parlipapers/result/pgpdocumentview?accountid=14697&groupid=95579&pgld=664f405a-82a1-45da-bd00-fad4de82685b#0>. Accessed 1 May 2021, p.200

<sup>79</sup> North Wales Counties Lunatic Asylum, *The first annual report of the North Wales Lunatic Asylum, Denbigh: for the year M.DCCC.XLIX*, p.10

<sup>80</sup> North Wales Counties Lunatic Asylum, *The first annual report of the North Wales Lunatic Asylum, Denbigh: for the year M.DCCC.XLIX*, pp.10-11

<sup>81</sup> Anon. ‘Christmas Festivities and Performance at Denbigh Asylum’, *Denbighshire Free Press*, no. 769, (28 December 1895) [n.p.] Available at: <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3769309/3769312/9/>. Accessed on 9 March 2021.

The article goes into extensive detail about the festivities including noting the decorations of “banners, garlands, holly and ivy”.<sup>82</sup> Events like this were not only held on special occasions. Burtinshaw and Burt report: “Music, dancing, libraries and sport were just some of the activities available.”<sup>83</sup> Further evidence is provided within the *First Annual Report* where details of a dance are recollected: “It was truly gratifying and affecting to witness the decorum as well as the joyous delight of these poor people”.<sup>84</sup> Events like these were important, not just in a rehabilitative way, but when considering the question of welfare. Activities like this would have been financially out of reach for many paupers to attend with any regularity out in the community. The activities provided by the asylum, such as a weekly dance, significantly improved the welfare and quality of life of the pauper insane.

In addition to how the pauper insane were housed, it is important to consider the provisions of food and clothing made available to them and how this impacted their wellbeing. Burtinshaw and Burt suggest that patients “wore hospital clothing”.<sup>85</sup> The Commissioners in Lunacy report, appended to the *First Annual Report*, noted “patients were clean in their persons, and their clothing was of good quality”.<sup>86</sup> Specialist clothing was used for some patients, these items of clothing were designed specifically to aid patients. For example, lockable boots<sup>87</sup> were used for patients who “kicked off

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<sup>82</sup> Anon. ‘Christmas Festivities and Performance at Denbigh Asylum’

<sup>83</sup> Burtinshaw and Burt, *Lunatics, Imbeciles and Idiots. A History of Insanity in Nineteenth Century Britain and Ireland*, p.145

<sup>84</sup> North Wales Counties Lunatic Asylum, *The first annual report of the North Wales Lunatic Asylum, Denbigh: for the year M.DCCC.XLIX*, p.8

<sup>85</sup> Burtinshaw and Burt, *Lunatics, Imbeciles and Idiots. A History of Insanity in Nineteenth Century Britain and Ireland*, p.140

<sup>86</sup> North Wales Counties Lunatic Asylum, *The first annual report of the North Wales Lunatic Asylum, Denbigh: for the year M.DCCC.XLIX*, p.10

<sup>87</sup> Anon, *Lockable boots used at Denbigh Mental Hospital*, (N.D.), Available at: <https://www.peoplescollection.wales/items/44955>. Accessed 16 May 2021.

their shoes”<sup>88</sup> and ticking dresses<sup>89</sup> were used to prevent patients “pulling them off and tearing them”.<sup>90</sup> When considering this in relation to the welfare of a mentally ill pauper, it is clear that the availability of clean, warm and specialist clothing was beneficial to their wellbeing.

Regarding food, the *Lunacy Act of 1890* confirmed that visiting Commissioners retained the ability to “determine and regulate the diet of the pauper patients”.<sup>91</sup> In the *Thirty-Sixth Annual Report to the Lord Chancellor of the Commissioners in Lunacy* it is highlighted that “grace was sung, the meal was put hot on table, and the fare was very good”.<sup>92</sup> When comparing this to the treatment of the pauper insane prior to the establishment of Denbigh Asylum, it is clear that the regulation and monitoring of these provisions within the asylum, provided a more stable and uniformly positive result for the welfare of mentally ill paupers.

When looking at employment, *The Second Annual Report of the North Wales Lunatic Asylum* (henceforth referred to as *The Second Annual Report*) points out “able-bodied patients are occupied mostly in agricultural and horticultural employment; some assist in the tailor and shoemaker’s shops; and a few are employed in the picking noile and

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<sup>88</sup> Michael, *Care and treatment of the mentally ill in North Wales, 1800 – 2000*, p.96

<sup>89</sup> Anon, *Untearable dress from Denbigh Mental Hospital*, (N.D.), Available at: <https://www.peoplescollection.wales/items/44957>. Accessed 16 May 2021.

<sup>90</sup> Michael, *Care and treatment of the mentally ill in North Wales, 1800 – 2000*, p.96

<sup>91</sup> *Lunacy Act 1890* (53 & 54 Vict., c.5)

<sup>92</sup> Commissioners in Lunacy, Copy of the Thirty-Sixth Annual Report to the Lord Chancellor (London, 1882), Available at: <https://parlipapers-proquest-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/parlipapers/result/pgpdocumentview?accountid=14697&groupid=95579&pgId=fae53d03-0d54-4279-8223-e74bd5f5e802>, Accessed 14 May 2021. p.241

fibre”.<sup>93</sup> As the asylum claimed employment was vital to rehabilitation it was a very important aspect of asylum life and something that was also monitored by the Commissioners in Lunacy during their visits. In the *Twenty-third Annual Report to the Lord Chancellor* they detailed that “altogether 152 men have constant occupation. Of the women there are 102 who have also daily employment”.<sup>94</sup> There are similarities here to life outside of the asylum, where some pauper ‘idiots’ and ‘lunatics’ were able to undertake employment; however, employment was seen as therapeutic within the asylum and therefore it was necessary for as many patients to partake in it as possible. By contrast, outside of the asylum employment was often more about survival. Therefore, it can be assumed that a significantly higher proportion of those within the asylum were in employment compared to the community. The introduction of work would have provided a stable routine for many, the opportunity to keep busy and learn, and, according to the asylum, a helping hand in rehabilitation. All factors that would positively impact the wellbeing of a mentally ill pauper.

Regarding language, Burtinshaw and Burt explain “asylum staff were recruited locally and therefore Welsh was their first language. As a result...the establishment became very much a Welsh institution”.<sup>95</sup> Michael also suggests “This public institution was probably unique for its time in promoting the use of the Welsh language”<sup>96</sup> and “Rule

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<sup>93</sup> North Wales Counties Lunatic Asylum, *The second annual report of the North Wales Lunatic Asylum, Denbigh: for the year M.DCCC.L.* (Denbigh, 1851). Available at: <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/mthmde2m>, Accessed 9 May 2021, p.12

<sup>94</sup> Commissioners in Lunacy, Copy of the Twenty-third Annual Report to the Lord Chancellor (London, 1868-9), Available at: <https://parlipapers-proquest-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/parlipapers/result/pgpdocumentview?accountid=14697&groupid=95579&pgId=c83d4c82-2a80-4459-9c0a-704130b18a8c>, Accessed 14 May 2021, p.158

<sup>95</sup> Burtinshaw and Burt, *Lunatics, Imbeciles and Idiots. A History of Insanity in Nineteenth Century Britain and Ireland*, p.96

<sup>96</sup> Michael, *Care and treatment of the mentally ill in North Wales, 1800 – 2000*, p.58

No. 1 stipulated that ‘All the Officers of this Institution...are required to have a thorough Colloquial knowledge of the Welsh language’.<sup>97</sup> Comparatively, Welsh was the predominant language across North Wales, therefore for mentally ill paupers, the only deviation from this was for those who required institutionalisation in England prior to the introduction of the Denbigh Asylum. As chapter one addressed, the ability for a mentally ill pauper to communicate in their own vernacular was essential and any circumstance where this was not possible could prove detrimental to their welfare. With this in mind, it is clear for those who required committal in North Wales, Denbigh asylum offered the most beneficial outcome.

In addition to the use of the Welsh language, it is important to note that patients were given a voice within the asylum. The *Lunatic Asylum Act of 1842* required the Metropolitan Commissioners to “inquire into and state the usual Condition, as well mental as bodily, of the Pauper Patients”.<sup>98</sup> An example of such enquiries is detailed within *The Twenty-eighth Annual Report to the Lord Chancellor* where the Commissioners in Lunacy state “we have seen all the patients and made the usual statutory inquiries as to their care and treatment”.<sup>99</sup> This clearly evidences that the insane were communicated with and reported on. Although it should be recognised that the reports may be biased, in that they contain only the information the authors wished to be known. When examining the voice of a pauper ‘idiot’ or ‘lunatic’ within

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<sup>97</sup> Michael, *Care and treatment of the mentally ill in North Wales, 1800 – 2000*, p.58

<sup>98</sup> *Lunatic Asylums Act 1842: An Act to amend and continue for Three Years, and from thence to the End of the next Session of Parliament, the Laws relating to Houses licensed by the Metropolitan Commissioners and Justices of the Peace for the Reception of Insane Persons, and for the Inspect of County Asylums and Public Hospitals for the Reception of Insane Persons.* (5 & 6 Vict, C A P LXXXVII)

<sup>99</sup> Commissioners in Lunacy, *The Twenty-eighth Annual Report to the Lord Chancellor* (London, 1874), Available at: <https://parlipapers-proquest-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/parlipapers/result/pgpdocumentview?accountid=14697&groupid=95579&pgId=9b956cd7-423d-4b1d-b731-28dd2e4a8476>, Accessed 14 May 2021, p.141

the community, this is harder to quantify; aside from the *Supplemental Report* there does not appear to have been regular enquiries into the care of individuals. When considering how being heard impacted the welfare of mentally ill paupers, it is clear that through more frequent monitoring, issues could be spotted and rectified quicker and therefore this would reflect positively on their welfare.

As explained in chapter one, religious non-conformity was common in North Wales. Hirst and Michel demonstrate that the theory of insane paupers sitting across the religious spectrum bares true through examination of the patients admitted in 1884: “41 patients admitted were members of the Church of England, 53 were Calvinistic Methodists, 8 Baptist, 7 Independents and 24 of other religious affiliations”.<sup>100</sup> However, within Denbigh Asylum, unlike the outside world, patients were not free to explore their own religious practices as “all patients who attended the chapel were addressed by the chaplain, nominated by the Church of England”.<sup>101</sup> Although significantly it is confirmed in *The Second Annual Report* that “None are compelled to attend against their inclination”.<sup>102</sup> This is important, as whilst an inability to engage in denomination specific religious activity will have negatively impacted the wellbeing of individuals, no mentally ill pauper was forced to engage with religious practice that went against their own belief.

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<sup>100</sup> David Hirst and Pamela Michael, Recording the many faces of death at the Denbigh Asylum, 1848 - 1938 in *History of Psychiatry*, Vol 23, No. 1 (2012), p.44

<sup>101</sup> Hirst and Michael, Recording the many faces of death at the Denbigh Asylum, p.44

<sup>102</sup> North Wales Counties Lunatic Asylum, *The second annual report of the North Wales Lunatic Asylum, Denbigh: for the year M.DCCC.L*, p.16

Having looked at the impact of accommodation, nutrition and clothing, employment, language and religion on the day to day lives and welfare of a mentally ill pauper residing in Denbigh Asylum, it is now necessary to assess the impact of the treatment and care available and whether this could be regarded as rehabilitative. *The Third Annual Report* confirmed that “the two great objects to be sought for in the moral treatment of the Insane are employment and recreation – that these are as much essentially necessary for the modern mode of treatment as medicine, or nourishing food”.<sup>103</sup> Michael evidences this approach through her summation that “Occupation was seen as a therapy”.<sup>104</sup> When looking at the care offered the *Second Annual Report* points out “exercise and occupation in the open air is found to be most conducive to the bodily health, as well as the mental improvement of the insane”.<sup>105</sup> Michael surmises “The main emphasis in terms of treatment was on developing...a kindly, structured environment”.<sup>106</sup> This kind of structure and attitude towards treatment of mentally ill paupers would have been beneficial to their wellbeing, especially compared to the lack of care and treatment available within the local community.

Within *The Twenty Third Annual Report of the North Wales Lunatic Asylum*, the Medical Superintendents Report, referred to the introduction of Turkish Baths to the asylum. Whilst the report noted that it was too soon to “express any positive opinion as to its curative powers generally”<sup>107</sup> it went on to conclude that “In several cases of

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<sup>103</sup> North Wales Counties Lunatic Asylum, *The third annual report of the North Wales Lunatic Asylum, Denbigh: for the year 1851*, pp.5-6

<sup>104</sup> Michael, *Care and treatment of the mentally ill in North Wales, 1800 – 2000*, p.71

<sup>105</sup> North Wales Counties Lunatic Asylum, *The second annual report of the North Wales Lunatic Asylum, Denbigh: for the year M.DCCC.L.*,.12

<sup>106</sup> Michael, *Care and treatment of the mentally ill in North Wales, 1800 – 2000*, p.69

<sup>107</sup> North Wales Counties Lunatic Asylum, *The twenty third annual report of the North Wales Lunatic Asylum, Denbigh: for the year 1871*. (Denbigh, 1872). Available at: <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/f2u8b4rg>, Accessed 13 May 2021. p.13

acute mania it has produced a marked and beneficial effect".<sup>108</sup> The asylum also used some medications such as "iodine, quinine, hyoscine, digitalis"<sup>109</sup> and had specialist equipment such as "epileptic caps"<sup>110</sup>. The availability of such treatments and equipment was undoubtedly beneficial to mentally ill paupers, as they were not readily available within the local community.

One type of treatment the asylum advocated against was "mechanical restraint".<sup>111</sup> The *Lunacy Act of 1890* refers to the use of mechanical restraint explaining it "shall not be applied to any lunatic unless the restraint is necessary for purposes of surgical or medical treatment, or to prevent the lunatic from injuring himself or others".<sup>112</sup> The *Second Annual Report* also included a report from the Commissioners in Lunacy which points out "No patient is at any time placed under mechanical coercion in this Establishment".<sup>113</sup> It was noted in the *Thirty-Fourth Report* that "We do not find any recorded instance of the use of mechanical restraint"<sup>114</sup>. It is clear from analysis of the reports that Denbigh Asylum, even prior to the *Lunacy Act 1980* coming into effect, was against the need for such restraint unless absolutely necessary. This is significant as it shows a clear attitude of care towards the wellbeing of mentally ill paupers. It also shows a marked improvement in their welfare, especially when compared to the

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<sup>108</sup> North Wales Counties Lunatic Asylum, *The twenty third annual report of the North Wales Lunatic Asylum, Denbigh: for the year 1871*, p.13

<sup>109</sup> Michael, *Care and treatment of the mentally ill in North Wales, 1800 – 2000*, p.69

<sup>110</sup> Michael, *Care and treatment of the mentally ill in North Wales, 1800 – 2000*,.69

<sup>111</sup> North Wales Counties Lunatic Asylum, *The second annual report of the North Wales Lunatic Asylum, Denbigh: for the year M.DCCC.L*, p.13

<sup>112</sup> *Lunacy Act 1890* (53 & 54 Vict., c.5)

<sup>113</sup> North Wales Counties Lunatic Asylum, *The second annual report of the North Wales Lunatic Asylum, Denbigh: for the year M.DCCC.L*, p.13

<sup>114</sup> Commissioners in Lunacy, *Copy of the Thirty-Fourth Report of the Commissioners in Lunacy to The Lord Chancellor (Presented pursuant to Act of Parliament), 1880*, p.200

evidence of individuals being subjected to restraint, such as the manacled patient detailed within the *First Annual Report* earlier in this dissertation.

When considering rehabilitation, the importance of early asylum admittance was claimed in the *First Annual Report* by the Chairman, John Heaton. He suggests that “if this disease is subjected to proper medical treatment in the earliest stage, in six cases out of seven a permanent cure is effected”.<sup>115</sup> The *Second Annual Report* confirms that “76 patients have been admitted; 28 patients have been discharged cured”<sup>116</sup>. Whilst it is not possible to clarify with any certainty how accurate these figures are, it is clear that rehabilitation was possible. The *First Annual Report* provides a case study of the effects of rehabilitation in the form of a “poor young creature, who, before her admission, was tied down to her bed for many months...rapidly recovered. Soon after her discharged...she wrote to the matron...she is now an excellent assistant in the wards”.<sup>117</sup> As evidenced within chapter one, the treatment within the community was largely non-existent and therefore there was no hope of rehabilitation. When considering rehabilitation in the context of the wider question regarding welfare, it is evident that the only opportunity of rehabilitation was through admittance to an asylum, and therefore Denbigh had to be considered as a positive influence on the wellbeing of those it aided.

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<sup>115</sup> North Wales Counties Lunatic Asylum, *The first annual report of the North Wales Lunatic Asylum, Denbigh: for the year M.DCCC.XLIX*, p.4

<sup>116</sup> North Wales Counties Lunatic Asylum, *The second annual report of the North Wales Lunatic Asylum, Denbigh: for the year M.DCCC.L*, p.10

<sup>117</sup> North Wales Counties Lunatic Asylum, *The first annual report of the North Wales Lunatic Asylum, Denbigh: for the year M.DCCC.XLIX*, p.8

At the same time as contemplating medical rehabilitation, it is worth pausing to note the “Ablett Fund”<sup>118</sup> which is detailed within *The Second Annual Report*. This was a fund set up “for the relief of the convalescent patients upon their discharge”.<sup>119</sup> Its support assisted people in getting back on their feet following discharge and arguably into a better position than they could have achieved without admittance to the asylum. The availability of such a fund becomes more important when acknowledging Wright’s submission that “for half of the people admitted to the asylum, and their families, the asylum ‘experience’ was a temporary solution”<sup>120</sup>. Therefore, for some at least, institutionalisation was not a long-term situation and the availability of funds such as the Ablett Fund would have been beneficial to the welfare of those it assisted.

Overall, when considering the welfare of those housed with the Denbigh Asylum it is clear that there was a philosophy of kindness and a genuine ethos of care and rehabilitation. Care was taken in providing adequate housing, clothing and food. Mentally ill paupers were able to engage in social activities and work, all of which would have heralded a positive result in their wellbeing. However, there were restrictions imposed on them, such as limited religious services, that would have had a negative impact on their welfare.

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<sup>118</sup> North Wales Counties Lunatic Asylum, *The second annual report of the North Wales Lunatic Asylum, Denbigh: for the year M.DCCC.L*, p.7

<sup>119</sup> North Wales Counties Lunatic Asylum, *The second annual report of the North Wales Lunatic Asylum, Denbigh: for the year M.DCCC.L*, p.7

<sup>120</sup> Wright, *Getting Out of the Asylum: Understanding the Confinement of the Insane in the Nineteenth Century*, p.144

## Conclusion

This dissertation has considered key aspects of a mentally ill pauper's life namely: accommodation, nutrition and clothing, employment, language, religion, care and treatment, and rehabilitation. These aspects of life have been analysed to establish the impact Denbigh Asylum had on the welfare of pauper 'idiots' and 'lunatics' in nineteenth-century North Wales.

Firstly, the essential factor of accommodation was considered. Prior to the introduction of Denbigh Asylum mentally ill paupers faced vastly different situations depending on their personal circumstances. Some were housed within strict workhouses, some were homeless and some were sent to English asylums. However, the vast majority were boarded out within the local community. Those within the local community could be well treated; however, there were also cases of serious cruelty. Ultimately there was a theme of mismanagement of the pauper insane, with the primary concern being cost not care. By contrast, life within Denbigh Asylum was regulated and monitored by outside forces such as the Commissioners in Lunacy, which allowed for regular monitoring of their care and treatment. Patients were segregated by gender and housed in comfortable surroundings, which not only minimised the risk of abuse but created a safe environment. For these reasons, the introduction of Denbigh Asylum should be deemed to have positively impacted the welfare of the mentally ill paupers it cared for.

Next, nutrition and clothing were considered. Chapter one explained that once again much would depend on the personal situation of the insane pauper and the attitudes of those caring for them. This could lead to a significant variation in their treatment. This is at odds with the structure provided within Denbigh Asylum which ensured patients were well fed and clothed, once again positively impacting their wellbeing.

Consideration was also given to employment. Depending on the severity of their illness, mentally ill paupers were able to work before the introduction of Denbigh Asylum. However, the focus of rehabilitative employment in Denbigh asylum was more beneficial to the welfare of the mentally ill pauper than unregulated work within the community.

The importance of language has also been reflected on. For those paupers who required institutionalisation prior to the establishment of Denbigh Asylum, the lack of a Welsh speaking environment had a notably negative impact on their wellbeing. For those within the local community and latterly those housed within Denbigh Asylum, the ability to communicate in their own vernacular was invaluable.

It has additionally been noted that religion was a significant aspect of life in nineteenth-century North Wales. Chapter one explained how religious non-conformity was prominent in Wales and those residing within the community were free to explore their religious freedom. Unfortunately for those who resided in Denbigh Asylum that religious freedom was not extended in the same capacity and this could have been considered as detrimental to their welfare.

Finally, care and treatment and rehabilitation has been assessed. It is clear that before the introduction of Denbigh Asylum there was very little care, if any, provided to pauper 'idiots' and 'lunatics'. Those considered sufficiently dangerous may have been sent to an asylum; however, as the *Supplemental Report* makes clear, these patients had deteriorated too far for any prospect of rehabilitation. Those paupers living within the community were faced with the bleak prospect of no rehabilitation and instead were left to flounder in often very challenging environments. Within Denbigh Asylum the focus was on care and rehabilitation through routines of working and enjoying a social life. Other treatments were introduced over time such as the Turkish Baths. The premise of work and recreation remained the cornerstone of the treatment provided within Denbigh Asylum, with some patients subsequently considered rehabilitated and released from the institution.

This dissertation has explored the accommodation, nutrition and clothing, employment, language, religion, care and treatment, and rehabilitation available to mentally ill paupers, both before Denbigh Asylum and within its walls. The asylum provided pauper 'idiots' and 'lunatics' with a regulated place of refuge to receive basic care, treatment and the possibility of rehabilitation. When compared to the experiences of mentally ill paupers prior to its introduction, it is clear that Denbigh Asylum with its philosophy of kindness and rehabilitative care had a significant and positive impact on the welfare of mentally ill paupers.

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