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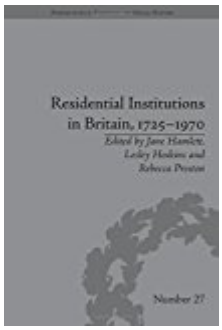

Jane Hamlett, Lesley Hoskins, Rebecca Preston, eds.. *Residential Institutions in Britain, 1725-1970.* Perspectives in Economic and Social History Series. New York: Routledge Press, 2013. 256 pp. $153.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-84893-366-8.

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Published on H-Disability (May, 2017)

Commissioned by Iain C. Hutchison (University of Glasgow)

This volume grew out of a conference held in 2010, and although six of its ten chapters are London-centric, it works not only because of the diverse subjects the contributors cover but also because of the extensive time span, from 1725 to 1970. Each chapter stands alone and although there are some similarities, their differences engage and inform the reader. The collection offers "snapshots of the lives of various establishments at different points in time" and claims to be the first comparative study of modern British institutions (pp. 2-3). The subjects range from institutional interiors to lodging houses, hospitals, asylums, workhouses, residential libraries, universities, and army quarters. Indeed, the editors describe this volume as a "cross-institutional study," demonstrating "the interaction between inmates and [their] environments," giving insights into their "lived experiences" (p. 15).

A variety of sources are used to examine the residents and their environments, from court and casebook records, official reports, letters, and patient responses, to a small number of photographs from the pages of *Living London* magazine. These photographs are tidy representations of institutional spaces, which may have been posed or idealized, yet they help to create some sense of time and place. Some show the inmates and staff of institutions at work and at leisure. One shows a smoking room of Rowton House (a lodging house) empty of people; perhaps the type of people who inhabited this institutional space did not fit the philanthropic ideal promoted at the turn of the century in these houses. Although this space might have looked suitably domestic, the reality was that the space did not "stimulate ideal behaviour" as expected by the founders (p. 103). Civilized behavior was not always achieved, and noise, theft, violence, and "physical discipline" marred the image of the ideal domestic setting (p. 105). The laborers who lived there paid six pence a night toward the cost of their accommodation; they were voluntary, but temporary, residents. Cubicles could only be booked on a nightly or weekly basis and men were not guaranteed the same

cubicle each night; therefore, these spaces may not have been as orderly as expected.

Many of the institutions included in this volume were premised on managing people on the fringes of society, the so-called problem people. Yet the appeal of this book is enhanced because the establishments are not restricted to institutions of confinement, like the asylum, hospital, and workhouse, but include institutional living in workplace and educational settings. The institutional experiences of those living in the university, army, and public library environments were quite different from the experiences of those living in confinement. The former were essentially entered voluntarily, and, instead of containing or managing inmates, these institutions promoted and encouraged self-improvement. Additionally, the English cottage home used for convalescing psychiatric patients of the Mental After Care Association focused on short-term recuperative care. These "cottage homes melded the recognizable domesticity of the family dwelling with the planned and supervised care of the institution" (p. 111). Unlike the other institutions, these homes typically held up to four residents for periods of a few weeks with some run by retired mental hospital nurses who were expected to be able to manage recovering mental patients. Therefore, because of the role of these former mental healthcare professionals, such homes could legitimately be viewed as "an outpost of asylum institutions" (p. 118).

Common to all of these establishments were rules regulating the behavior of the residents. Protests and resistance to such rules and regulations are explored throughout this volume. One example is the use of the space by the residents of hostels for working men known as Rowton Houses. Use of institutional space in the Rowton Houses for such activities as cooking meals at times seems at odds with the aims and intentions of the organization that emphasized order and following the rules. This emphasizes that although an institutional space may have been designed for a certain purpose, in practice the use of communal recreational space was determined by the responses and behavior of those living there, both staff and inmates. Food is also the focus of the chapter concerning the Hampstead Smallpox Hospital as it was considered "central to [their] social identity" as patients, not paupers (p. 10). This was because inmates of the hospital, which was administered as part of the Poor Law until 1883, were largely drawn from the working classes, but they objected to being viewed as paupers. They protested about their diet, voicing their anger against "dependence and degradation," and they fought to be acknowledged as bonafide patients (p. 37). Expressing complaints to a Commission of Enquiry in 1871, they described the "miserable hospital food" as "vile and not fit for paupers" (p. 43). Poor food was viewed by many as a punishment for being sick, yet the authorities implied that inmates should be grateful.

During the 1930s, a quite different form of punishment was reserved for the mentally defective girls who lived at Waverley Park House, a voluntary institution near Kirkintilloch, Scotland, where doctors colluded with the matron to induce sickness and diarrhea by means of the "sick needle" that was used to administer Apomorphine to transgressors. Those of good behavior were allowed free passes to the cinema and concerts, and church visits, which demonstrates that a limited measure of social and community interaction was allowed alongside a harsh regime of institutional "care" where punishment for running away might include six weeks in bed. Over time, improvements in care and changes of staff were made, but the matron and doctors in the 1930s could and did refuse to send girls home. They claimed that these girls were "not fit for outside," and this may have contributed to some inmates spending most of their lives within this institution (pp. 74-75).

It is useful to note that the establishments showcased throughout the collection were set up

for different purposes to fulfill the needs of different time periods. They are inevitably diverse yet there are overlaps. Comparisons are made throughout the book with domestic living of the period concerned; both the inmates and the organizations that created these establishments made efforts to make these institutional spaces replicate home environments. For example, as one photograph from *Living London* demonstrates, some inmates personalized their space with postcards and photographs on the walls of their cubicles. In 1917, the women's auxiliary army quarters went to great lengths to enhance the experiences of women away from home and to aid in recruitment to the corps by making material additions of curtains, linoleum, and two-bedded cubicles for privacy. Individual feminine touches were allowed, such as flowers, drapery, and pictures, all of which assisted in combating homesickness (although later it was deemed that more spartan quarters was the price to be paid for integration of women into these settings). In this context, "martial femininity" enhanced the experiences and softened rivalry between women and men (p. 142). Amicable relations and military integration were promoted through joint sports recreation, dances, whist drives, craft activities, etc., especially between the officer classes. Yet, for the ordinary auxiliary corps member, there were physical barriers to male integration and fraternization in the form of guard posts, high fences, and screwed-down windows to prevent soldiers' attention—wanted or not.

Residential libraries, found within London's rate-assisted libraries between 1885 and 1940, are atypical of institutional living. There were separate entrances and stairways for residents, which denoted distinct domestic and public institutional space. This form of domestic institutional accommodation was commodious and well built, usually part of a patron-funded library building, with an apartment for the resident male librarian and his family, which often included private gardens. It is unsurprising that these posts were sought after and that many librarians continued to remain in their posts long term until retirement. But the boundaries between institutional living and private domestic space were blurred because the trade-off for this comfortable middle-class domesticity was that the librarian also functioned as a caretaker, porter, and fireman, while also policing the building through long hours of operation. Although in some cases the librarian was closely monitored, their domestic arrangements were seldom challenged. There were instances, for example, of the librarians and their families using the institutional space for regular social get-togethers with other librarians.

Institutional care of the London poor was already established in workhouses sixty years before the Poor Law Act of 1834. In 1776, the average number of pauper inmates in a London workhouse was 201 per workhouse (p. 79); these were large-scale institutions that catered to nine different classifications of pauper—from children and vagrants to those of good disposition and the sick. In some cases, the sick and healthy shared beds. Class distinctions were made, there being a "small quality ward," for those deemed to be of "higher social status," while downward social mobility was a reality for some unfortunates. Inmates of these workhouses could not leave without permission, and work was compulsory for the able-bodied, although in a few cases some inmates could earn a small wage for nursing fellow inmates or working as porters. Drunkenness and illicit drinking was a problem and visitors were searched. Any inmates found to be drunk after short trips outside the institution were barred from entry for a month—a long time to survive without means of support.

Moral management and gendered space is examined in the case of the London County Council Asylums between 1890 and 1910. Outdoor work, such as gardening and farm work, was seen as a male role, while female patients often worked indoors in the kitchens or laundry. For much of the

time in these institutional spaces women and men were segregated. The introduction of female nurses to care for male mental patients at Bexley Asylum, where their "mothering instincts" were believed to make them "naturally suitable" for the post of mental hospital nurse had the added benefit of "imposing a powerful civilizing effect on the patients," helping to reduce violent behavior (p. 62). Some male patients saw this change in nursing staff as reducing them to being treated like children, albeit making them more manageable. Increased feminine influence also came with the domestication of asylum interiors, but the introduction of carpets, pictures, and plants was challenged by one patient who viewed freedom and liberation from the institution, not home comforts, as the most important measure for the lived experience of a patient.

The final chapter is considerably shorter than all the others. It addresses cultural improvement through the domestic living arrangements experienced by working-class students in halls of residence at civic universities from 1870 to 1970. Institutional living was aimed at civilizing the working-class student from a socially inferior background. Yet the halls of residence also aimed to "create a true academic community" and, in the process, to expose students to a better way of living, "lift them above their background," and to "inculcate the children of working-class and middle-class families with values it was believed they would otherwise not encounter" (p. 164). They aimed to transform the student in the process, and to build character by equipping them with solid social attributes influencing how they behaved, talked, and ultimately thought. Many halls in these "red brick universities" were furnished with items that promoted a collegiate atmosphere (p. 160). To create a sense of history, portraits of past benefactors and officials were hung in dining halls, while some universities invented traditions and added formality, such as the wearing of gowns and the use of Latin graces at dinner.

There are a wide range of approaches to institutional history within this volume. It is a collection that provides information, stimulus, and an engaging read for both social and institutional historians and does indeed offer a cross-institutional study. It is hoped that further well-researched accounts of different types of institutional living will follow its lead.

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Citation: Dee Hoole. Review of Hamlett, Jane; Hoskins, Lesley; Preston, Rebecca, eds. ***Residential Institutions in Britain, 1725-1970.*** H-Disability, H-Net Reviews. May, 2017.

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