

LORD CULLEN OF ASHBOURNE replied to the debate in a somewhat discursive speech, reverting more than once to the same subject. As regards mental handicap, he pointed out that separation would be difficult in an amending Bill, but promised that the Government would see whether 'we can break out of this situation'. Details of social workers' training would have to be worked out locally. He confirmed that the 70-strong Commission would be split up into five groups around the country. Lord Cullen said hardly any-

thing on the treatment question, but, in a previous intervention, Lord Elton had mentioned the practical difficulty of assembling a multidisciplinary team, of even two persons, in cases where there was any degree of urgency.

The Bill was then committed to a Committee of the whole House.

It is perhaps noteworthy that none of the medical peers took part in the debate.

ALEXANDER WALK

The Scottish Psychiatric Research Society

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The Society was founded at a meeting in the Royal Edinburgh Hospital in December 1961. Most of the twenty-one foundation members, who came from all four Scottish university medical school centres, were young men, lecturers or senior registrars for the most part. They elected John Smythies president and Ian Oswald secretary and drew up a constitution which committed the society to meet 'at least twice a year . . . in the four Scottish universities in rotation', other centres also being asked to act as host from time to time. The primary aim of the society was 'to promote and encourage research into psychiatry and allied disciplines' and it was a multidisciplinary society from the beginning. Two of the foundation members were clinical psychologists and for some years a biochemist, Dr Todrick, was president.

The society has remained remarkably faithful to its original objectives. In the twenty years since its foundation it has held 40 scientific meetings, the most recent at Gartnavel Royal Hospital in October 1981. The Crichton Royal Hospital in Dumfries was brought into the rotation at an early stage, and since then meetings have been held twice a year in Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Glasgow, Dumfries and Dundee in sequence, usually in the spring and autumn.

One of the society's main functions has always been to provide a forum in which relatively inexperienced research workers could describe the results of their endeavours, and it is interesting to see the names of young men like Ashcroft, Eccleston, German, Oswald and Timbury in the programmes of the early days. Usually half an hour is allotted to each paper—twenty minutes for delivery and ten for discussion—and between eight and ten papers are read in the course of a day. Attendance has varied from as few as 20 to 90 or more, the majority usually coming from the host centre

and a group of committed enthusiasts making the journey from the other four.

Although the original constitution refers to an annual subscription, voting rights, a quorum and the other accoutrements of constitutional propriety, the society seems to have settled down to a stable and effective *modus operandi* without any subscription or formal list of members. Most of its business is conducted by a secretary, usually a senior registrar or lecturer, in each of the five centres, and a president who is generally a senior member of one of the four University Departments. Each secretary is responsible for drumming up offers to give a paper at the next meeting, passing these offers to the secretary in the centre acting as host for that meeting, and circulating the programme. The president, currently myself, serves for three or four years, takes the chair at one of the two scientific sessions at each meeting (the other being the responsibility of a senior member of the host department) and provides transport to and from meetings for those less wealthy than himself.

Looking back over the past twenty years the society has served its purpose very well. Although it is impossible to tell to what extent it has stimulated people to do research they would not otherwise have done, it has certainly provided young men and women with an opportunity to describe their work to a wider audience than their own departments. It has also provided a convenient meeting ground for all Scottish psychiatrists and clinical psychologists interested in research and enabled them to keep abreast of developments in other parts of Scotland.

The next meeting of the Society will be at the Crichton Royal on Friday 16 April 1982. Further details from the local secretary, Dr Diana Morrison, Crichton Royal Hospital, Dumfries.