

Psychiatry in Pictures

The Lawn Hospital, Lincoln, and Dr Robert Gardiner Hill

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The Lincoln Lunatic Asylum, later The Lawn Hospital, was established following a bequest by Dr Paul Parnell and financed by public subscription and fees from patients. The hospital was designed by the architect Richard Ingleman of Southwell, Nottinghamshire. Work began in 1819 and the hospital opened in 1820. As was the case in several early asylums, the building was in the style of a grand country house (Fig. 1). Ingleman had designed Sneinton Hermitage near Nottingham (1810–1812), one of the earliest hospitals to be established under the provisions of the County Asylums Act of 1808, and later designed the Warneford Hospital, Oxford (1821–1826).

In 1837, the house surgeon Dr Robert Gardiner Hill (1811–1878) suggested to the physician Dr Edward Parker Charlesworth (1783–1853) that the wards in his charge could be conducted without recourse to physical restraint. This opinion was recorded in the 13th Annual Report on the State of the Lincoln Lunatic Asylum to the Governors by Dr Charlesworth: 'The House Surgeon has expressed his own belief, founded upon experience in this house, that it may be possible to conduct an Institution for the Insane without recourse to the employment of any Instruments of Restraint whatsoever [...] attention to the Patients shall be altogether substituted for the use of instruments'. It is noteworthy that Dr Charlesworth gave full credit to Dr Gardiner Hill for his initiative.

The outcome of a trial of non-restraint was reported in a lecture given by Dr Gardiner Hill at the Mechanics' Institution in Lincoln in 1838 and subsequently published. In his address Gardner Hill stated 'I wish to complete that which Pinel began' and asserted that 'in a properly constructed building, with a sufficient number of suitable attendants, restraint is never necessary, never justifiable, and always injurious, in all cases of Lunacy whatsoever'. The methods used at the Lincoln Asylum were adopted by Dr John Conolly and used in a modified form at Hanwell Asylum, Middlesex, of which he was medical superintendent and then the largest in the country, giving impetus to the movement to abolish the use of physical restraint in the management of patients with mental illness. There was also opposition to Gardner Hill's ideas which led him to resign from his post at the Lincoln Asylum in 1840. Many years passed before the practicability of his ideas was fully recognised. The Lawn Hospital was closed in 1985 and was purchased by Lincoln City Council, which used it until 2016, when it was sold again and redeveloped for commercial use.

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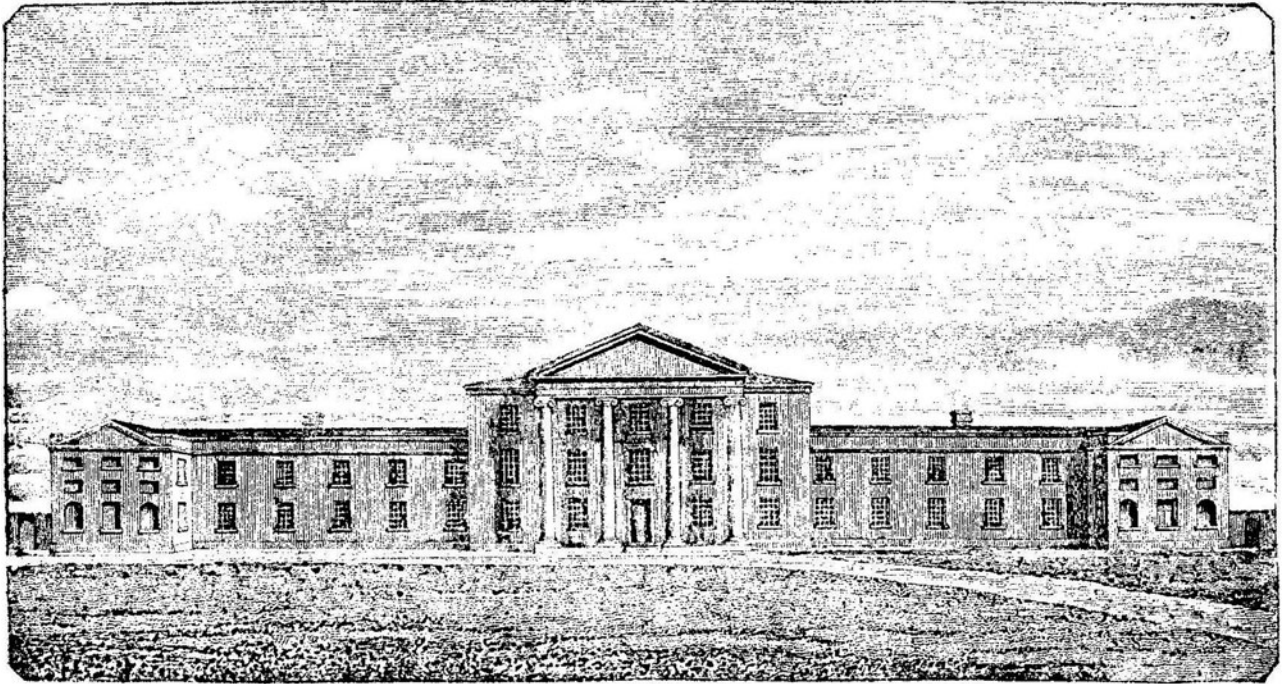


Fig. 1 The drawing is taken from the first Annual Report to the Governors of the Lincoln Lunatic Asylum in 1822. I am grateful to Francis Maunze, the archivist of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, for retrieving it from the College archives.