

There is one matter I should like to draw attention to, that is, the continual nuisance caused by the slaughter-yards built opposite and in close proximity to the asylum. The stench arising from those yards is at times unbearable, so that the patients are obliged to leave the front of the terrace. This matter has been repeatedly brought by myself and the Gaoler under the notice of both Borough Council and Board of Health, and, although they admit that a nuisance does and must exist from the unsuitability of the site, nothing has been done to remedy the evil, nor is it likely to be unless the Government take some steps in the matter. There is one thing certain that, in addition to the offensive smell, it must have an injurious effect on the health of both patients and staff.

During the year a block of land at the rear of the asylum containing 140 acres has on my application been reserved for asylum purposes. This is a very valuable property, owing to the large quantity of valuable timber growing upon it, and in addition to this, when the timber is cut off, it will afford employment for the patients in clearing it for agricultural purposes for years to come.

Owing to the increase in the number of patients, the sleeping accommodation is becoming inadequate. There is at present in excess of the accommodation four males and five females, including one female absent on trial.

In conclusion, I personally regret the great loss the institution has sustained by the death of Dr. Skae, our late Inspector.

CHRISTCHURCH.

Report by Mr. Alexander Lean, Deputy-Inspector.

Christchurch, 31st March, 1882.

ON the 25th instant I attended the annual entertainment given to the patients of this asylum. The staff exerted themselves to the utmost to contribute to the amusement of the inmates. Many of the friends of patients were present, and I cannot but think that the unrestrained intercourse with the outside world on these occasions has a beneficial effect.

The reports I have forwarded every month have conveyed to you any suggestions that have occurred to me after inspection; but, prior to the meeting of Parliament, it may be useful for me to give the Minister a short sketch of the present condition of the institution from the point of view which a lay inspector may be supposed to take, and quite apart from the technical or statistical detail which the Resident Medical Superintendent of the department may supply.

My last annual report was under date the 8th January, 1881. At that date the old buildings were crowded with 139 patients; one ward only of the new buildings for males being occupied by 25 patients. The female wards were occupied by 89 patients, a complement in excess by four of that for which the building was designed. At the present time I am happy to say that, of 178 male patients, 150 have accommodation in the new buildings, and not the least satisfactory spectacle on the occasion of my visit was that three out of the four old wards in the timber buildings were empty of patients. It is only those who have seen these wards overcrowded in the daytime, and at night unsavoury from ill ventilation, that can properly appreciate the relief afforded to the patients by the accommodation lately provided for them. The female wards designed for 84 patients, allowing 600 cubic feet to each patient, now hold 94 patients. Additional dormitory accommodation to contain fourteen beds is now approaching completion, giving a margin of four beds for any increase during the year. The erection of a central block to contain dining hall, kitchen, stores, and offices, is an indispensable necessity. The kitchens in the old buildings are remote, and meals conveyed so long a distance to the wards cannot be served with comfort. If the patients be taken to the old hall in wet weather they suffer exposure. For these obvious reasons a kitchen attached to the new buildings is required, and I believe the drawings are in hand, but I am unaware of any steps being taken towards the erection of a central hall. A central hall I submit is of the greatest value. In wet weather, serving the meals in the wards, beside vitiating the air, creates a monotony of confinement, while the simple change to a hall for meals is a pleasant and valuable relief to the patients. Again, a no less valuable feature in a hall is the facility offered for the amusement of patients.

In justice to the administration, I must record the pleasant aspect of the new male wards, which now vie with the female wards in comfort; comfortable dormitories, spacious and cheerful apartments, flowers, fruits, and books or newspapers, contrast favourably with recollections of the wretched accommodation of the past.

Before leaving the subject of buildings, I venture to submit, as a politic economy, the expediency of a survey of the buildings being made quarterly by the Public Works Department, and a report being forwarded to you thereupon.

The increase in the number of imbecile and harmless patients suggests the consideration of the provision of a separate establishment. On the score of humanity it may be urged these would not then be exposed to injury from the companionship of violent cases, and on the score of economy it must be allowed a number of patients would cease to occupy asylum accommodation to whom necessarily expensive adjuncts are not indispensable. Patients recovered from lunacy but in weak health, and indeed other helpless invalids, might be also taken charge of in the same institution.

The reception of inebriate patients in any lunatic asylum is open to objection, but that they should be placed among lunatics is against reason. Yet want of accommodation leads to this evil. Upon this subject I have from time to time recorded my opinion. I now again urge a separate provision for this class of patients, and more particularly for females. Under date the 22nd December, 1879, I reported on the case of Mrs. S—, No. 891: "A female at best of weak mental fibre, who has further damaged her system by excess in drink, would, I presume, when subjected to the reaction consequent on restriction from the stimulant, be extremely susceptible to such morbid ideas as the surroundings may suggest, and I feel bound to observe that if it be expedient to confine drunkards I am of opinion they should not be placed in a lunatic asylum."