

# Dr Helen Boyle of Brighton (1869-1957)

First Woman President of the Royal Medico-Psychological Association

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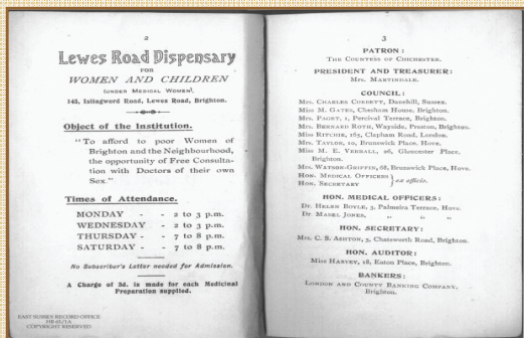
## The Life of Helen Boyle

*No one should join any profession without being determined to contribute something new, of value to that profession.\**

Helen Boyle was born in Dublin in 1869, where she spent her first thirteen years, then lived on the Continent with her family and was educated in France and Germany. She trained at the London School of Medicine for Women from 1890, qualifying in 1893 with the Scottish triple qualification, becoming licentiate of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh, the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh, and the Royal Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow. In 1894 she achieved her MD at Brussels with distinction.

Her first post was as assistant medical officer at the London County Council Claybury Asylum where Sir Robert Armstrong Jones was the Medical Superintendent, and while there she collaborated with the pathologist Sir Frederick Mott. At that time she was the first psychiatrist to identify bacillary dysentery amongst mental patients.

Later, while medical superintendent at Canning Town Mission Hospital in the East End of London she observed that nervous and mental disorders in their early stages were scarcely recognised and impossible to obtain treatment for until certification became necessary. It became her mission to improve this situation, and she visited various clinics abroad to see how other societies dealt with this.



Lewes Road Dispensary Report 1900

In 1897 she set up in general practice in Hove, Sussex with her friend Dr Mabel Jones - the first women doctors in Hove. This was at 3 Palmeira Terrace, 37 Church Road, and was mostly attended to by Mabel Jones. Helen Boyle started the Lewes Road Dispensary for Women and Children in Brighton which developed in 1905 into The Lady Chichester Hospital for the Treatment of Early Mental Disorders, the first of its kind. This was a successful pioneering venture, of which Helen Boyle remained the 'head and heart' for fifty years, seeing it through several moves and expansions. She continued to work there until the NHS took over in 1948.

In the 1914-18 war she served for five months in Serbia with the Royal Free Hospital Unit, and was decorated with the order of St Sava.

Helen Boyle was actively involved in the founding of several major societies:

- The Brighton Guardianship Society (1913), which aimed to keep 'mental defectives' within the Community.
- The Medical Women's Federation (1917)
- The International Medical Women's Federation (1922)
- The Child Guidance Council
- And the National Council for Mental Hygiene (later the National Association for Mental Health, now MIND) with Sir Maurice Craig and 'paid the rent of its office herself' for the first three years.

After becoming a member of the Medico-Psychological Society in 1898 Helen Boyle was always actively involved in the meetings and committees and in 1939 became its first woman president. In 1955 the spring meeting of the Royal Medico-Psychological Association took place at Hove in her honour on the occasion of the Jubilee celebrations of the Lady Chichester Hospital.

Helen Boyle died one day after her 88th birthday, in 1957.

\* Favourite saying.



## Major Papers

•A Case of Juvenile General Paralysis. *Journal of Mental Science* 1899 45: 99-105

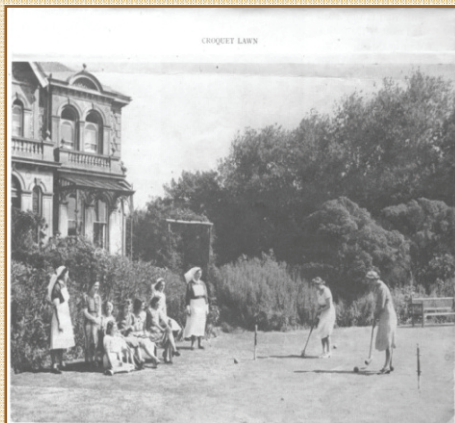
•Some points in the early treatment of mental and nervous cases (with special reference to the poor). *Journal of Mental Science* 1905 51: 676-681

•Account of an attempt at the early treatment of mental and nervous cases (with special reference to the poor). *Journal of Mental Science* 1909 55: 683-692

•Some observations on early nervous and mental cases, with suggestions as to possible Improvement in our methods of dealing with them. *Journal of Mental Science* 1914 60: 381-398

•The ideal clinic for the treatment of nervous and borderline cases. *Proc. Roy. Soc. Med.* 1922, 15: 39-48

•'Watchman, what of the night?' Presidential address delivered at the ninety-eighth annual meeting of the Royal Medico-Psychological Association held at Brighton, July 12, 1939. *Journal of Mental Science* 1939 85: 0-870



## Other Sources

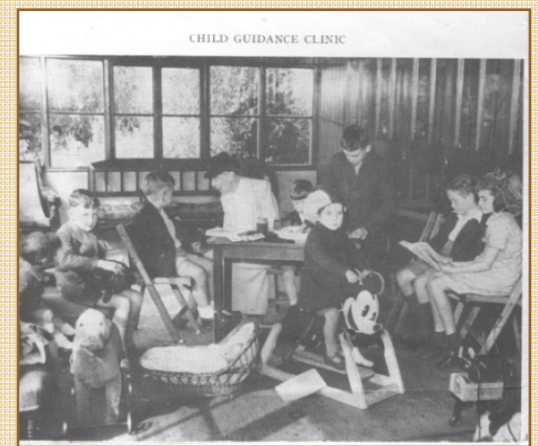
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Dr. Helen Boyle, 1869-1957.  
<http://womenofbrighton.co.uk/helenboyle.htm>  
East Sussex Record Office  
Hingston, C. L. The Jubilee of the Lady Chichester Hospital, Hove, Sussex. *Journal of the Medical Women's Federation*, 1955: 80-84.  
Hingston, C. L. and Vince, C. Death of a Pioneer: A Helen Boyle. *Journal of the Medical Women's Federation*, 1958: 72-75.  
Milliken, Emma. *Helen Boyle (1869-1957), physician and specialist in the treatment of mental illness*. Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. Oxford University Press 2004-11.  
Obituary: Helen Boyle, MD. *BMJ*, 1957, 2: 1310.



## The Lady Chichester Hospital

### The Principles

1. It is not reserved for nervous cases
2. The patients are not kept in bed unless needful
3. The medical supervision is done by people who have had some experience of both insanity and neurology
4. Numerous patients should be treated together
5. There should never be too many patients for the medical staff to know them thoroughly well personally
6. There should be provision for the treatment of women by women
7. There should be an entire absence of red tape



### Quotations

'Insanity begins before a person is insane, and it is then that recognition and skilled treatment are most valuable.'

'I saw mental patients ... neglected and maltreated until after days, months or years ... they were turned into the finished product - lunatics - and were certified.'

'I saw the impecunious and harassed mother of five ... with a nervous breakdown after influenza ... apply for treatment, wait many weary hours, and get a bottle and the advice not to worry... No hospital would take her because she had no organic disease; no asylum because she was not certified.'

'If anyone needs entire change of life and surroundings in order to get better surely it is the poor.'

'I have seen differences of opinion and treatment far wider and more radical than is apparent in other diseases, and the management of such cases undertaken by all and sundry.'

'If all neurologists were alienists too, and all alienists were also neurologists, in fact, neuro-alienists, we should begin to get a healthier and more intelligent public opinion on these vital matters.'

'Never will these early nervous and mental cases be efficiently understood until there are wards in the general teaching hospitals for them.'