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Alexander Walk (1901–1982)

Alexander Walk was more deeply involved with the RMPA during its 46 year existence than anyone else. He was interested in the history of the Association but less enthusiastic about the development to a College than his colleagues. His papers on many aspects of the old Association were invaluable for the present Author. Mrs. Peggy Walk who was for a number of years the ‘Registrar’ (Secretary or Executive Director for her time) kindly supplied me with a copy of his complete list of publications, which is appended to this short account of his life.

Alex Walk was more deeply involved with the RMPA during its 46 year existence than anyone else. He had been appointed an Assistant Editor of the Journal of Mental Science at the age of 27 in 1928 and continued to work for the Journal till his death aged 81. He was co-editor from 1930 to 1973 and then continued as Associate Editor till 1982. He filled every important post in the RMPA where he was (while simultaneously holding other duties) Librarian from 1945 to 1970. In that post he built up the College’s stock of antiquarian and historical books particularly those from the nineteenth century. He was President of the RMPA (1961–1962). He was also Secretary and later Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee which advised on the Mental Health Act 1959 and was Parliamentary Reporter until 1982. He was the RMPA representative on the General Medical Council and from 1953 to 1968. He was also a member of the General Nursing Council and the Association of Psychiatric Social Workers of which he was President from 1959–1961.

He was born in London in 1901, but received a good deal of his early education in Antwerp. He was a remarkable linguist speaking several European languages as well as both Modern and Biblical Hebrew. He was awarded a scholarship to St
Bartholomew’s Hospital, where he had a distinguished undergraduate career and graduated MB, BS (London) in 1923. As a student he was attracted to psychiatry and at the earliest opportunity he joined what was then the London County Council mental health service, first as a locum and then as a permanent member of the medical staff. He rose rapidly in the medical hierarchy and served in several of the mental hospitals of that service. In 1949 he became Medical Superintendent of Cane Hill Hospital, a post he filled with distinction until his retirement in 1962. He had proceeded to obtain his MD (London) in 1926, was the Gaskell medallist in 1929 and was elected to the honorary fellowship of the College in 1964. Alexander Walk died in 1982. As a scholar, historian, man of letters and linguist, his contribution to British psychiatry in general and to the RMPA and College were immense. As a person he was a rather asocial but kindly man who hid his light under a bushel. His contributions to the history of the Association would be hard to surpass.

References

Alexander Walk’s publications

1. History of psychiatry – general

(a) Published papers

*Some Aspects of the Moral Treatment of the Insane up to 1854*
Read at a Meeting of the Section of Psychiatry, Royal Society of Medicine, 9 February 1954.

*On the State of Lunacy*
President Address to the Association of Psychiatric Social Workers, 21 March 1959

*The History of Mental Nursing*
President Address at the One Hundred and Twentieth Annual Meeting of the Royal Medico-Psychological Association held at Cane Hill Hospital, 13 July 1960.

*The Pre-History of Child Psychiatry*
Read at a Meeting of the Child Psychiatry Section of the Royal Medico-Psychological Association, 12 February 1964

*Mental Hospitals*

*What we Thought About it All*

*Lincoln and Non-Restraint*

*Medico-Psychologists, Maudsley and the Maudsley*

(b) Draft papers and minor writings

*A Psychiatric Scrapbook for the year 1882*
Reconstruction of a talk given at a meeting of the South Eastern Division of the Royal Medico-Psychological Association, held at Cane Hill Hospital, 22 April 1952.
The Fathers and Mothers of Mental Nursing. Three (out of four) articles from the “Hillsman”, Cane Hill Hospital Staff Magazine (cyclostyled):

No.1 Not traced
No.2 Sir William and Lady Ellis. Vol.2, No.7, July/August 1954, 2–5
No.3 Dr Conolly and Miss Powell. Vol. 2, No.8, September 1954, 2–4

History of Mental Hospitals: The Last 150 Years
Draft of paper read at the National Association for Mental Health Meeting, 29 June 1956.

Psychiatric Pioneers and Precursors
Reconstructed from handwritten draft and notes for paper read at Royal Medico-
Psychological Association Lecture Course, 10 February 1958.

History of Mental Hospitals with Special Reference to Mental Nursing
Draft of Address to the National Association of Chief Male Nurses, 1958.

The North of England in Psychiatric History
Abstract of a paper read at the Annual Meeting of the Royal Medico-Psychological
Association, Sheffield, 7 July 1968.

A Note on John Conolly
Concluding remarks at a Meeting of the Section of Psychiatry, Royal Society of
Medicine, 10 May 1966, to commemorate the Centenary of John Conolly’s death.

John Conolly and His Historical Background
Incomplete handwritten draft found among Alex Walk’s papers. (?For a paper read at St.
Bernard’s Hospital during Conolly commemorative celebrations, 1966).

The History of the Rise and Fall of the Concept of “Moral Insanity”.
Handwritten draft found among Alex Walk’s papers.

Historical Outline of Terms Defining Mental Deficiency
Handwritten draft of part of a paper found among Alex Walk’s papers.

Mental Hospital Libraries in England
Draft of a talk (? Given at a Red Cross Meeting in the 1960s)

2. History of the RMPA and its forerunners.
(a) RMPA History, 1841–1968

Gloucester and the Beginnings of the RMPA
(In collaboration with Dr D. Lindsay Walker)
Read by Dr Walk as President of the Royal Medico-Psychological Association, at the
Association’s Quarterly Meeting, held at Gloucester, 3 May 1961.
“Forty Years of Wanderings”. The Medico-Psychological Association, 1855–1894

The Royal Medico-Psychological Association, 1900–1968
Handwritten draft article found among Alex Walk’s papers.

(b) Short papers on special aspects of RMPA history

The Centenary of the Journal of Mental Science
Journal of Mental Science (1953) 417, 633–637

The Royal Medico-Psychological Association – a Historical Note
(a handout, pre-1963)

The Royal Medico-Psychological Association – A Historical Note
(a handout, post-1963)

The History of the South Eastern Division
Abstract of a paper read at a special meeting of the South Eastern Division, 11 June 1970.

Farewell to Chandos Street

Arrival in Belgrave Square

Recollections and Impressions: 1. The Charter Meeting 1926.


Annual Meetings Recalled. 1. Twenty Five Years Ago.

More Annual Meetings Recalled. 2. One Hundred Years Ago.

Number Seventeen

The Royal College of Psychiatrists.
No.5 in the “Royal College” series, St. Bartholomew’s Hospital Journal (1973) 77, No.5, 135–139.
3. History of Cane Hill Hospital

Report of the Physician Superintendent, Cane Hill Hospital, for the years 1948–1949 and 1949–1950
(This was the first report under the National Health Service, and Dr Walk’s first report as Physician Superintendent. It has a historical section as well as a very full description of the Hospital’s current activities).

The Seventieth Anniversary of Cane Hill
The Hillsman, October 1953, 2–4.
(Later in the same month, on Monday 5th October, 1953, Dr Walk gave a talk on “How Cane Hill Started”, which, he said, would be far more than the “bare bones” of this article).

Cane Hill and “Mental Health” Policy, 1882

Cane Hill Hospital Badge and Names of Hospital Wards
Notes from Physician’s Report, December 1950.

4. Miscellaneous published items

Obituary of John R. Lord, by Dr Walk and three others


The Royal Medico-Psychological Association’s “Memorandum of Evidence” to the Royal Commission on the Law Relating to Mental Illness and Mental Deficiency
Drafted by Dr Walk, as Secretary of the Evidence Committee. Journal of Mental Science (1954) 421, 994–1020.

Mental Illness

Catalogue: “Psychiatry and Mental Health in Britain. A Historical Exhibition, 4th March to 9th July, 1963. Held at the Wellcome Library. (Organised by Dr Walk for the Wellcome Trust)

Mental Illness under the Mental Health Act (letter to the Editor)

Intelligence of Patients in Subnormality Hospitals (letter to the Editor).

Years of Grace (Tribute to Miss Grace Tingle, written jointly with Miss Natalie Cobbing)

Superintendents and Clinical Psychiatrists (letter to the Editor).

Cycles in the Care of the Insane (letter to the Editor).
British Journal of Psychiatry (1979) 134, 54

5. Reference list of Dr Walk’s collections of psychiatric history excerpts from News and Notes and the Bulletin of the British Journal of Psychiatry.

(a) Psychiatry in the 1870s

Community Care

Chloral Hydrate

Maudsley’s Presidential Address to the M.P.A., 1871
British Journal of Psychiatry News and Notes, April 1973, 10–11.

Unlocked Doors

Home Truths and “Hygiene” Myths

Lord Derby on Idiocy and Insanity, the Budget and Pauper Lunatics

Electrotherapy

Two questions in Forensic Psychiatry

Syphilis and Insanity – so near…!

G. Fielding Blandford on Moral Treatment

Kilvert’s Mad Folk (In collaboration with Edward Hare)
(b) Psychiatry in the 1880s

Private Asylums

The President’s Assassin and the Queen’s Would-be Assassin

A Great Presidential Address (Daniel Hack-Tuke, 1881)

(c) One Hundred and Twenty Years of our Journal

Prospectus.

Some passages from the first issue.

Passages from Volume I.
British Journal of Psychiatry News and Notes, February 1974, 10–12.

More passages from Volume I, 1854.
British Journal of Psychiatry News and Notes, April 1974, 12.

1854. The Non-Constraint Controversy Revived.

1854. Words and Works.

(d) Fifty Years Ago

The Macmillan Report