

HORTON HOSPITAL

An Epsom & Ewell Local & Family History Centre Research Guide

Following legislation in 1888, the London County Council began building institutions (London County Asylums) to house up to 2,000 pauper lunatics each. Beds were allocated centrally by the LCC with patients being sent to any mental hospital which had beds available, regardless of where they lived in London. As part of the plan, in Epsom, Surrey, over a thousand acres at The Manor of Horton were acquired in 1896. Six hospitals with a total patient population of 12,000 were planned but in fact a cluster of 5 hospitals was built, one of which was Horton.

Horton Asylum (later Horton Hospital) was founded in 1899 and opened in 1902, the second asylum to be built on the estate. Along with the other hospitals, Horton was at the forefront of advances in psychiatric medicine. Some patients were allowed access to the grounds and to the town. Recruitment of staff was initially a problem. The untrained male attendants and the female nurses received between £18 and £39 per annum and free board and lodging. Men had to ask permission to marry and only single women were employed.

During the First World War Horton Asylum's civilian patients were dispersed and it was taken over as a general military hospital for servicemen wounded in the war. King George V and Queen Mary visited in July 1916. In 1919 it was handed back to the LCC and in 1920 reinstated as a mental hospital and renamed Horton Mental Hospital, treating mainly female patients. By 1922 it had 1,605 patients of whom only 187 were men.

In 1925 the Malaria Therapy unit, under the command of Lt-Col S P James (1870-1946), was housed in the hospital's 14-bed isolation block. The block was named 'C' Hospital and also contained a separate specialist laboratory for the breeding of mosquitoes and the study of malaria.

In the 2nd World War Horton became an Emergency Medical Services hospital, receiving both civilian and military casualties and, after the war, Polish refugees. In 1948 the hospital joined the newly created National Health Service as part of its South West Metropolitan Region and by 1949 it had returned to use as a Mental Hospital. The buildings and grounds were in a very bad state by the end of the war, the wards derelict, so in 1950 work to modernise and improve the wards, equipment and surroundings began.

Under the NHS beds were not allocated irrespective of the patient's London home. Instead each hospital in the Epsom cluster received patients from designated catchment areas in one of the new NHS Metropolitan Regions. Patients sent to Horton Mental Hospital came from the boroughs of Wimbledon, St Marylebone, Paddington, Holborn, Hampstead and part of the City of Westminster.

The Mental Health Act 1959 had far reaching medical and administrative implications for hospitals such as Horton. One small but important change was renaming it Horton Hospital. The Act required that the word 'Mental' be omitted from hospital

names to emphasize that patients were on an equal footing regardless of what kind of hospital they were in.

An unexpected repercussion of the Mental Health Act was the extraordinary rise in admissions via the police, prisons and Courts of Law. In 1961 some 100 males and 25 females had been admitted and, by 1962, 130 males and 18 females, with the numbers unlikely to fall in future years. Horton Hospital had the dubious honour of admitting more mentally ill offenders than any other single hospital in the country. This was probably because its catchment areas included a number of railway termini, where drifters from all over the country, including many with chronic psychoses, were deposited, and a number of police courts at which offenders of no fixed abode were charged. However, because the hospital lacked secure accommodation there was a high rate of absconding.

In 1960 Horton Hospital housed 1,524 patients and at this time there was mention of its possible closure by 1975. In December 1971 there were 1,438 patients, including 17 beds in a specialist psycho-geriatric unit. By 1979 there were 1,203 beds. The hospital finally closed in 1997. In autumn 2002 the hospital was reported as closed, empty but in good condition.

There was a sale of land by the NHS in June 2003. Redevelopment as domestic housing began and the developer renamed the site 'Livingstone Park'.

Previous names:

- Horton Asylum (1902-1915)
- Horton War Hospital (1915-1918)
- Horton Mental Hospital (1918-1937)
- War Hospital (1939-1949)
- 1949 - returned to Mental Hospital

Records can be found at:

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[Link to the LMA catalogue search page](#)

[Link to the LMA Images for Horton](#)

Horton Cemetery

A strip of land at the north east corner of the site served as an unconsecrated burial ground for pauper patients from all 5 cluster hospitals between 1899 and 1955. For record of burials see www.epsomandewellhistoryexplorer.org.uk