

BOOK REVIEW

Samuel Hitch and the Gloucestershire General Lunatic Asylum *by Peter Carpenter*

Paperback, 277 pages

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This book describes the life of Samuel Hitch, (1800-1881), who became the first secretary and chief organiser of the Association of Medical Officers of Hospitals for the Insane (AMOHI), which was a predecessor of the Royal College of Psychiatrists. More than half of the 17 detailed and well-researched chapters deal with the Gloucestershire General Lunatic Asylum and Hitch's relations with it. There are also chapters on the AMOHI and Hitch's involvement in it and on Sandywell Park, a private Asylum, which Hitch was associated with between 1847 and 1864.

The book is well illustrated and each chapter is followed by notes and references. A chapter titled Conclusions sums up Hitch's life and shows that he was a complex and compelling character, who was good hearted and energetic, but not universally popular. Useful appendices at the end of the book provide sources for the images, summarise admission data for Gloucester Asylum between 1823 and 1847 and provide 8 pages of bibliography and list the different archives used.

The book describes how treatment of patients in Asylums, such as Gloucester, changed during the first half of the 19th century and considers the role of Hitch in these changes, providing context by looking at other asylums such as Stafford and Nottingham.

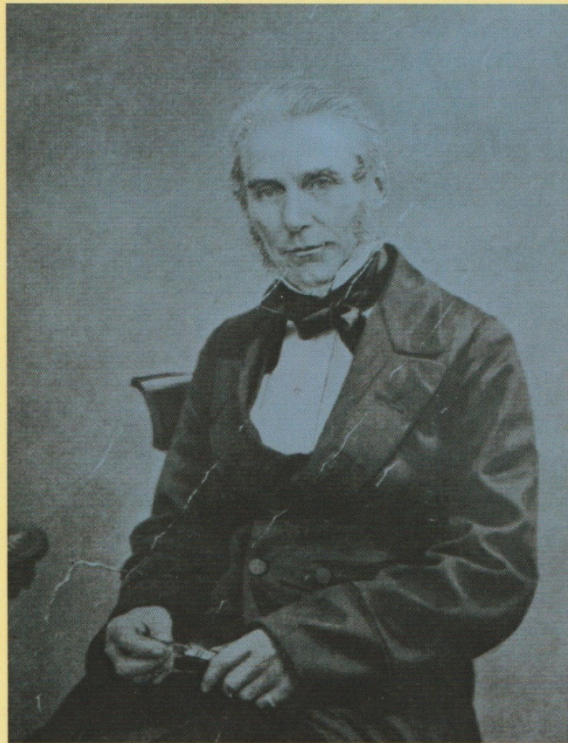
Samuel Hitch and the Gloucester General Lunatic Asylum will be of interest to those wanting to learn about the management of mental disease in early Victorian times and to those researching the establishment of the profession of Psychiatry. The author shows what can be done by diligent searching for material which was not always obvious, and in doing so casts light on an interesting and significant figure in the field.

David Wright

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