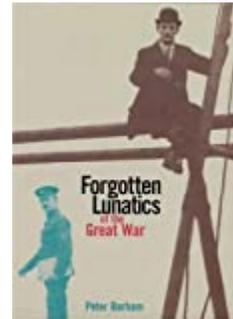




Peter Barham. *Forgotten Lunatics of the Great War.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004. 464 pp. \$45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-300-10379-3.



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Remembering the Forgotten Men of the First World War

During the past ten years, the shell-shocked soldier of the Great War has become increasingly visible in both popular accounts and academic histories. Yet the historiographical neglect of shell-shocked men in the inter-war period has only just begun to be addressed. Peter Barham's *Forgotten Lunatics of the Great War* details the experiences of the men who were incarcerated in lunatic asylums during the war and afterwards, and is one of the first works to emphasise the extent to which the mental anguish of the psychologically wounded veteran scarred the lives of the families and friends around them.

Barham's work is both curious and eclectic. The author is a psychologist and social historian who combines a detailed analysis of early-twentieth-century mental health policy with the stories of ordinary men driven mad by war. In addition, the text is enlivened by vignettes which portray the experiences, responses and emotions of a variety of characters as they journey through countless military and medical institutions.

Forgotten Lunatics provides us with a wealth of information about wartime mental hospitals, the pension system, developments in wartime psychology and into

the very particular homecomings of shell-shocked men who tried, and sometimes failed, to re-build their civilian lives. There is also an intriguing afterword on "Remembering the Forgotten Lunatics." This is a subject which is currently unexplored but which is sure to excite interest in the future, especially given the continued public interest in the cases of British soldiers who were executed for cowardice and desertion during the Great War.

This book is not just about shell shock. The author pieces together the narratives of "forgotten lunatics," and does so in a way that engages with wider debates about the impact of the Great War and its aftermath. Barham agrees with those who argue that many of the social changes experienced in postwar Britain were, to some extent, developing before the war, and in particular engages with contemporary debates about welfare reform and citizen's rights. The author recognises the discrepancy between high-minded government rhetoric and the actual treatment of mentally disturbed veterans. However, one of the most original features of this work is the way in which the author also notes how various governments were forced to accede to the demands of soldiers

and their families, as individuals grew increasingly conscious of their rights as citizens.

Barham's work prompts a number of questions. The focus upon the state care of wounded veterans leads one to question the extent of private or charitable care available. He does include the work of the Ex-Services' Welfare Society (ESWS), the only British charity committed to the care and treatment of shell-shocked men, but much more research into the role of the voluntary sector is required. I would also question Barham's claim that the ESWS presented a "feminized" image of recovering veterans, as an investigation of the ESWS archives reveals an institution keen to present its men as hard-working and respectably masculine.[1]

Nevertheless, *Forgotten Lunatics* provides readers with an excellent insight into the range of sources available on this subject. Military and medical archives are entwined with quotes from James Joyce's *Ulysses*, and the reflections of elite medical practitioners lie alongside comments from county asylums. There are also really

useful appendices which could provide a sound starting point for anyone interested in further research.

This book is full of complex ideas and the author is not afraid of either paradox or ambiguity. At the same time it is completely engaging and always thought-provoking. It must be compulsory reading for everyone interested in the history of shell shock and the impact of the Great War in Britain.

Note

[1]. The Ex-Services' Welfare Society Archives are held at Combat Stress, Tyrwhitt House, Leatherhead, Surrey, England.

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