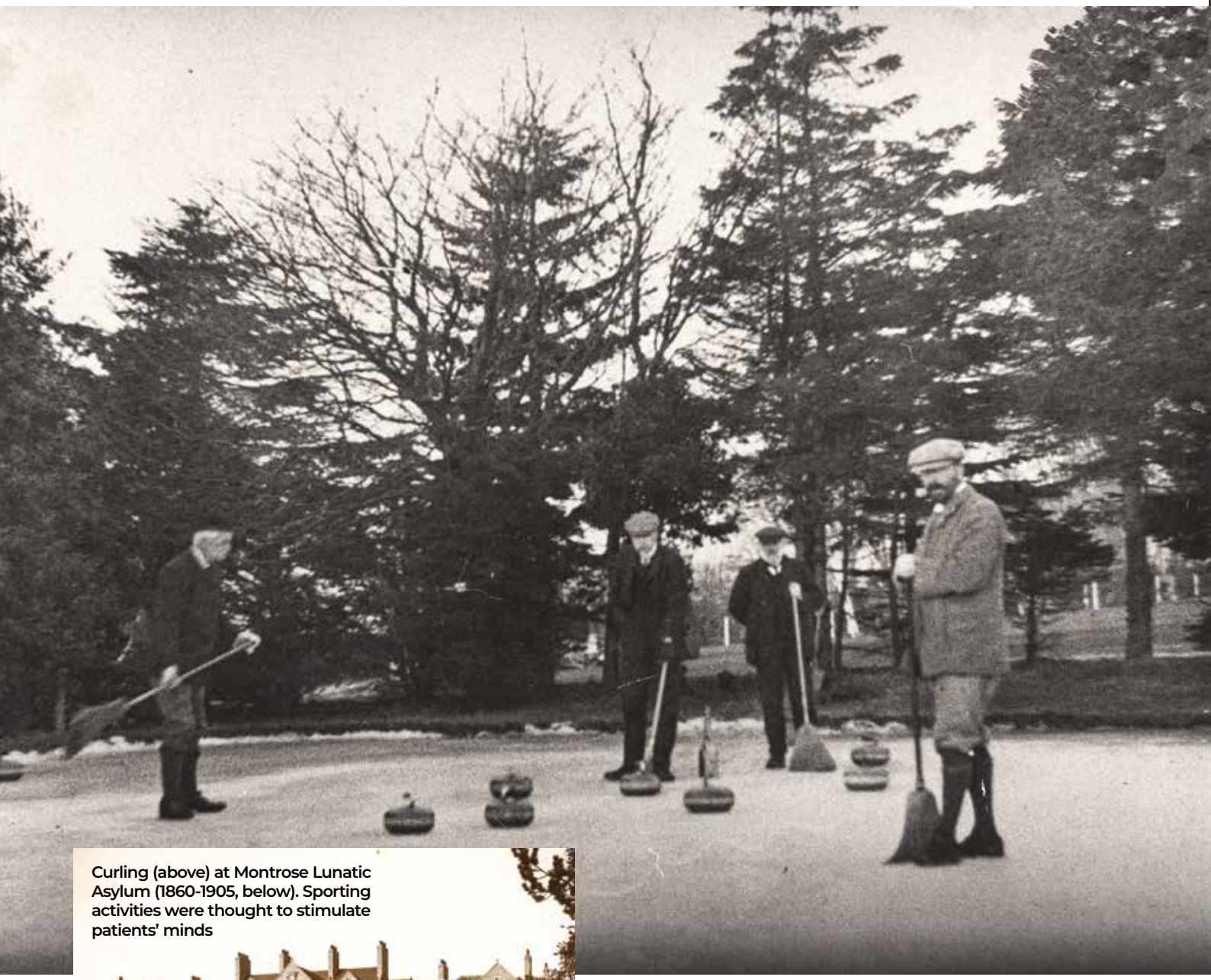
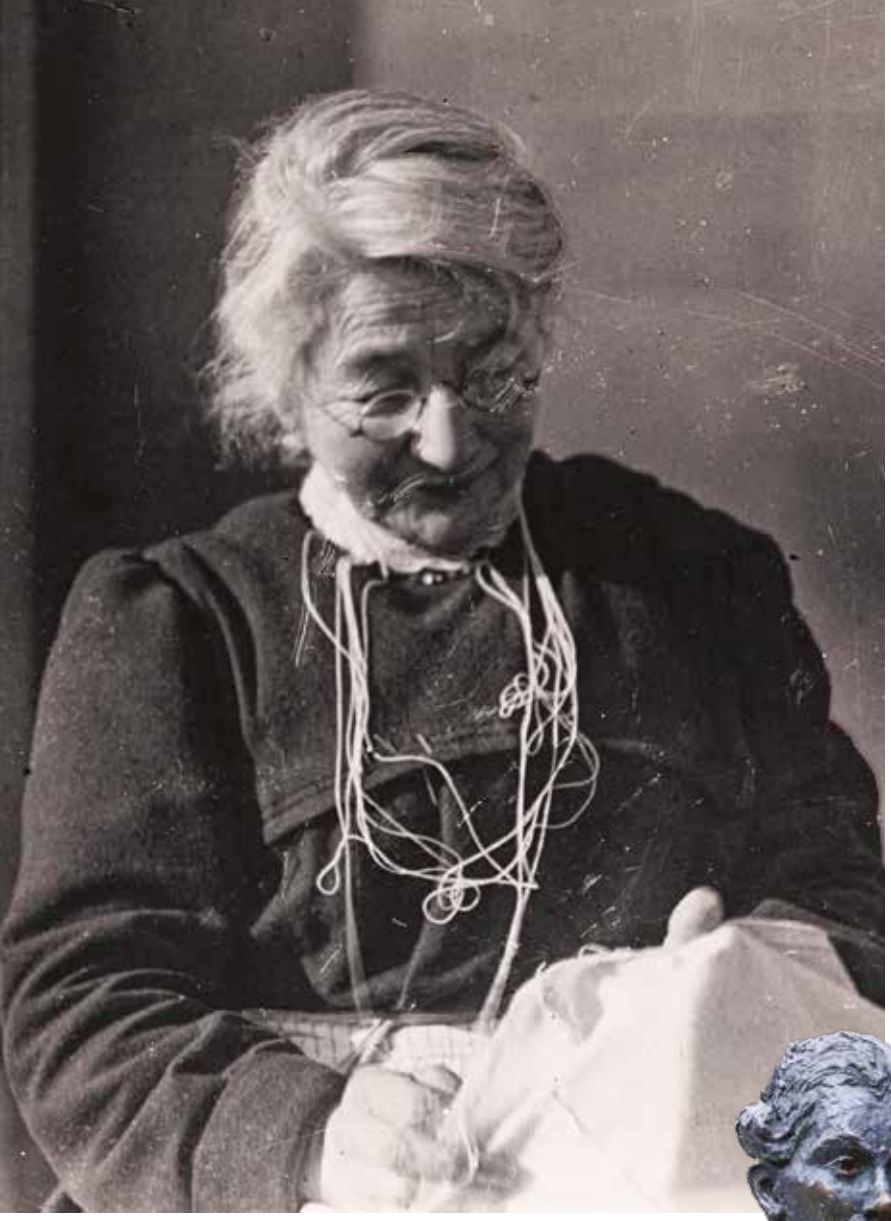
Health of a nation



Curling (above) at Montrose Lunatic Asylum (1860-1905, below). Sporting activities were thought to stimulate patients' minds

The history of mental health in Scotland has its share of acts of cruelty and abandonment, yet, as historical records reveal, greater awareness and pioneering therapies brought positive and lasting change

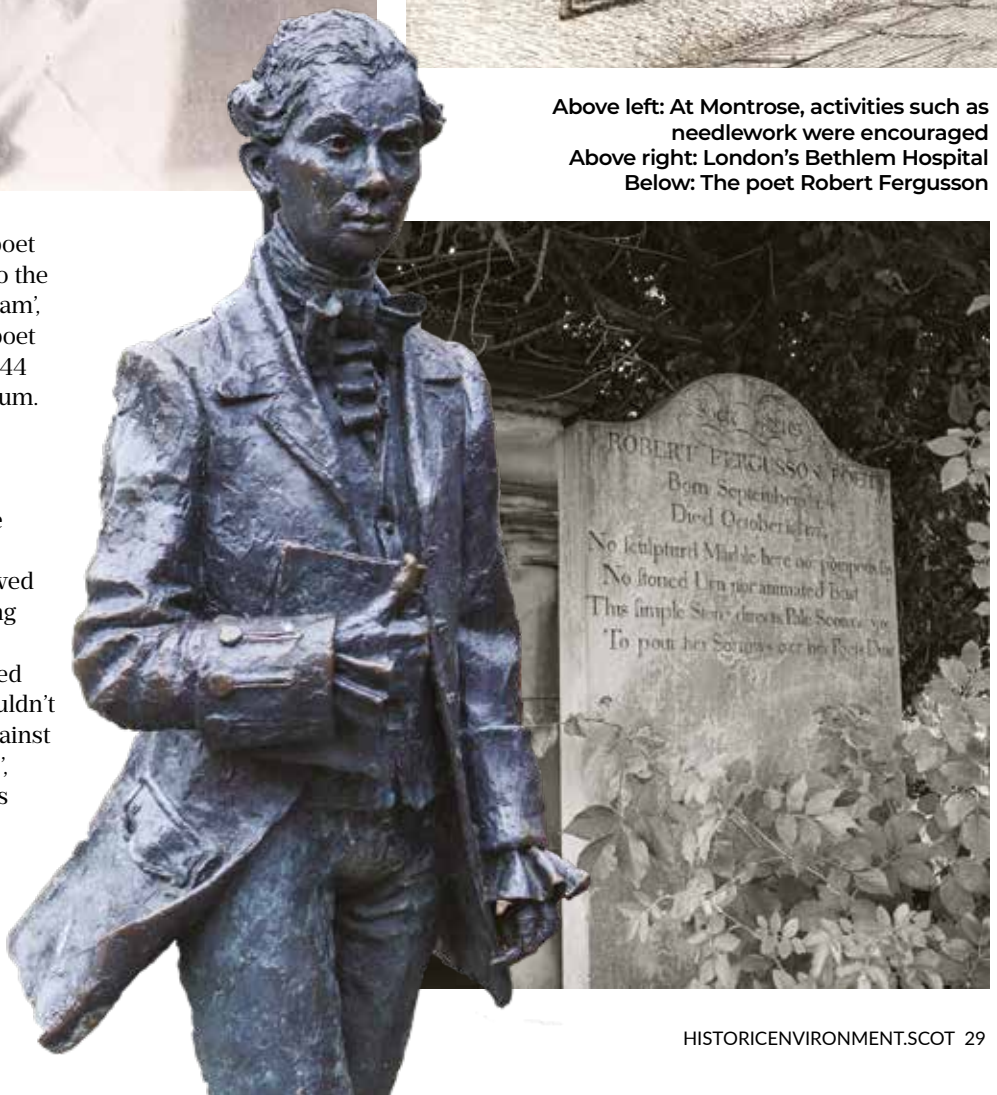
WORDS: CLAIRE PRENTICE



Above left: At Montrose, activities such as needlework were encouraged
Above right: London's Bethlem Hospital
Below: The poet Robert Fergusson

In late 1773 the Edinburgh poet Robert Fergusson wrote 'To the memory of John Cunningham', commemorating a fellow poet who had died at the age of 44 in a Newcastle mental asylum. Fergusson, a young man about town, suffered from melancholia and his poem reflects on Cunningham's short life and the fragility of fame.

Tragically, the poem foreshadowed Fergusson's own fate. The following year, Fergusson fell and suffered a serious head injury. He was deemed "utterly insensible". His mother couldn't look after him so he was taken, against his will, to Edinburgh's 'madhouse', Darien House. Dubbed Edinburgh's Bedlam (a reference to the famous Bethlem Hospital in London), its patients were chained to walls and locked up in cells with poor sanitation. He was visited there by Dr Andrew Duncan, a friend



TAYSIDE HEALTH BOARD, LICENSED BY UNIVERSITY OF DUNDEE ARCHIVE SERVICES/CHRIS DORNEY; CLAUDIO DIVIZIA, SHUTTERSTOCK, ALAMY

In the early years of mental healthcare, the emphasis was not on treatment, but on isolation, containment and restraint

from his student days, who was appalled by the conditions and vowed to work to improve them.

Fergusson died in October 1774, aged just 24. Duncan's campaign for a more humane asylum finally bore fruit in 1813 with the opening of the Edinburgh Lunatic Asylum, known today as the Royal Edinburgh Hospital. Fergusson's literary fame ensured that his story has been remembered.

For centuries, many Scots experiencing mental ill health remained in family homes, due in part to a widespread distrust of doctors. Others lived with paid carers or keepers, while some were sent to asylums, prisons or poorhouses. Some ended up on the street.

In the early years of mental healthcare, due to limited understanding, the emphasis was not on treatment, but on isolation, containment and restraint. 'Remedies' were crude and were typically only used on the 'furious' and those who could afford to pay for them. They included bloodletting, natural sedatives and purgatives.

Archival insights

There is a rich archive relating to mental ill health in Scotland, from private journals and letters, to the records of hospitals and asylums. And though individuals and their symptoms were often described in language – such as 'hysterical', 'lunatic' and 'fool' – which seems cruel today, the stories that survive offer fascinating glimpses into the mental health of our nation.

Lord Lewis Gordon fought in the Jacobite Rising of 1745 and raised troops at Huntly Castle. After the Jacobites were defeated at Culloden, where Gordon witnessed brutal clashes, he escaped to France where he became increasingly mentally unstable. Describing his condition, an associate in Paris wrote, "Poor Lord Lewis Gordon is mad."

He made repeated attempts to escape his keeper and, in 1751, another associate wrote, "I'm afraid he'll never get the better of his disorder." Gordon is reported to have mutilated himself and died before his 30th birthday. It is possible that his experiences on the battlefield left him suffering from what would today be called post-traumatic stress disorder.

The lives of wealthy women brought challenges of a different nature. Lady Dorothea Sinclair was a vibrant and determined young woman who rebelled against her strict, overbearing mother. In 1759, she married James Duff, one of the most powerful landowners in the northeast of Scotland, and Duff House became one of their residences. The couple did not have children and over

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ON LOAN FROM HIS GRACE THE DUKE OF FIFE. IMAGE: NEW WAVE IMAGES

Left: Sketch of the Edinburgh Lunatic Asylum, which became the Royal Edinburgh Hospital Below left: Duff House Below right: Portrait of Dorothea Sinclair, whose husband described her 'madness' in various letters



From left: William Cullen, Susan Carnegie and James Boswell all helped to bring mental illness awareness to the fore

Patients from the Montrose asylum dancing, an activity thought to provide therapy for sufferers of mental illness

Asylums, such as Inverness, pictured, placed an emphasis on music and activities after the 1857 Lunacy Act came into force

time the marriage grew strained, and they separated.

In letters, Duff describes Dorothea's "madness." Well into the 20th century she continued to be described as neurotic, an umbrella term used to describe symptoms and disorders without a physiological explanation, which gained popularity in the medical profession after the Scottish physician William Cullen coined the term 'neurosis' in 1769. Cullen was physician to David Hume and at the centre of Scottish Enlightenment attempts to systematise the study of medicine.

The Enlightenment's emphasis on observation and collecting empirical evidence brought a more scientific approach to the diagnosis and treatment of mental illness. The focus shifted from containment and there was a growing recognition of the link between physical and mental health, and the beginnings of a more holistic approach to treatment.

A sense of community

These principles were evident in the 1781 opening of the Montrose Lunatic Asylum (later Sunnyside Royal Hospital), Scotland's first public asylum. It was the brainchild of writer, pioneering moral reformer and philanthropist Susan Carnegie, who stressed the need for a humane approach.

This asylum aimed to create a pleasant environment and a sense of community. It offered opportunities for physical activity and recreation through the provision of gardens, allotments and a library. Patients could take part in musical and theatre performances and art and language classes. A step in the right direction, it would be decades before this serene philosophy became widespread. Many sufferers were tormented by their symptoms, and with limited understanding of the causes of mental illness, doctors could offer little insight into their plight.

James Boswell, the Scottish advocate, biographer and friend of Dr Samuel Johnson, wrote candidly in his journals about his mental health struggles. He suffered from alternating bouts of melancholia and mania, and his journals record his heavy drinking and sexual compulsions, including regular liaisons with prostitutes.

Johnson and Boswell toured Scotland in 1773, visiting many sites now in our care, including Iona Abbey and Fort George. Johnson also suffered from bouts of 'melancholia', which he described as the 'black dog'. He advised Boswell to follow a self-help regime that many modern doctors would approve of. It included taking exercise, keeping busy, avoiding excessive alcohol consumption and having regular social interaction. Modern writers have posthumously diagnosed Boswell with depression and cyclothymic disorder, a rare mood disorder.

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Turning point

Assessing the number of people in Scotland who suffered from mental ill health at any one time is challenging. In his 1828 book *A General View of the Present State of Lunatics and Lunatic Asylums*, Sir Andrew Halliday surveyed asylum and parish records and concluded that there were 3,700 "insane persons and idiots in Scotland" in 1826, with more than half of those confined to private homes, often living with family, 648 in asylums, and upwards of 1,600 living at large "wandering over the country and subsisting by begging."

Major changes in the treatment of the mentally ill followed the introduction of the 1857 Lunacy (Scotland) Act, which aimed to standardise practices and ensure better treatment. It included a programme for building publicly funded district asylums aimed at those who could not afford the fees charged by private and charitable 'Royal Asylums'. It also created a centralised authority to oversee the wellbeing of individuals cared for in public asylums and at

A STORY OF THREE SISTERS

James IV's granddaughters kept a surprisingly low profile

The Douglas coat of arms (right) on a panel at Kinneil House

Unusually for women from prominent families, sisters Elizabeth, Margaret and Beatrix Douglas, granddaughters of James IV, kept a low profile. A letter from 1562 described all three as being, "certeyne tymes or the most parte of the yere distempered with an unquiet humour."

Little is known about Beatrix, who married Robert Maxwell, 6th Lord Maxwell, but rather more is known about the other two sisters.

Elizabeth's husband, James Douglas, was reputed to be one of the most ruthless men in Scotland. Through marriage he inherited an earldom and Aberdour Castle. While James entertained friends at Aberdour, Elizabeth spent her time at Tantallon Castle in East Lothian, far from political life. A record relating to Elizabeth described how, "She herself became distracted of her wits." Elizabeth was later denounced an "idiot and prodigal," and forbidden to manage her own affairs.

Margaret married James Hamilton, 2nd Earl of Arran, receiving Kinneil House near Bo'ness in the marriage settlement. They separated for time when Arran tried to divorce Margaret. They reconciled, but Margaret spent much of her time at Kinneil, away from the public gaze. Her son James (3rd Earl of Arran) was described as "ane idiot or altogidder furious" and in 1566, "was released into the care of his mother and kept latterly at Craignethan Castle", prompting speculation the illness was hereditary.

Kinneil House, left, and Caerlaverock feature in the women's story

Marriage to Elizabeth gave James Douglas Aberdour Castle

Exterior and interior of Craiglockhart where soldiers such as Siegfried Sassoon, below, were treated during and after the First World War

home, and to investigate reports of ill-treatment or neglect.

For many families, though, asylums remained a fearful place. The young Arthur Conan Doyle, who would go on to become a physician and create the fictional detective Sherlock Holmes, was sent to stay with a family friend at Liberton Bank House in the 1860s. The move was to protect him from the influence of his depressive, alcoholic father, Charles Altamont Doyle. By the late 1880s Charles's mental health had deteriorated to such an extent that he was sent to the renamed Montrose Royal Lunatic Asylum, which had received a Royal Charter in 1810.

Terrible experiences

In an early Conan Doyle short story, *The Surgeon of Gaster Fell*, a young doctor is accused of imprisoning an elderly man in a "sinister cage". It emerges that the doctor is the man's son, and that he has resorted to this desperate measure to keep his father from the lunatic asylum.

"It would weary you were I to describe the terrible experiences which his family have undergone," Doyle wrote. "By the blessing of God, we have succeeded in keeping his poor crazed fingers clear of blood."

Though fear of the asylum continued to cast a long shadow over those suffering from mental illness, some people saw them positively, as places of treatment and respite.

One woman staying at the mental hospital in Inverness in 1914 said: "I feel myself a different woman to-day, and have had a splendid appetite, better than I have had for many a day... I only wish I had come here a few months ago, and I would never have suffered as I have done."

The first decades of the 20th century saw further developments in treatment. Returning soldiers from the First World War, including the poets Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen, were treated at Edinburgh's Craiglockhart Hospital for 'shell shock' (today known as PTSD) by the pioneering Dr William Rivers, who deployed 'talking cure' treatments (a forerunner to contemporary psychotherapy). The patient-centred approach at Craiglockhart encouraged activity, including exercise and other pursuits, such as contributing to the hospital magazine.

The hospital's admission and discharge records survive and provide an insight into the reluctance of doctors filling them out to record psychological disorders, perhaps due to the lingering stigma. Though the term "neurasthenia" is used regularly, it is typically given secondary importance below physical complaints such as "gas poisoning," "migraine," "compound fracture of toe" and even "haemorrhoids."

Extraordinary advances

What lay ahead in the 20th century was a future of extraordinary advances, the growth of different analytical schools, a proliferation of talking-cure therapies, the introduction of psycho-pharmaceutical treatment in the 1950s, and the controversial 'anti-psychiatry' movement. All these innovations were based not only on generations of medical practice, but on the lived experience of mental ill health over hundreds of years.

Admission records provide an insight into the reluctance of doctors to record psychological disorders, perhaps due to lingering stigma

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