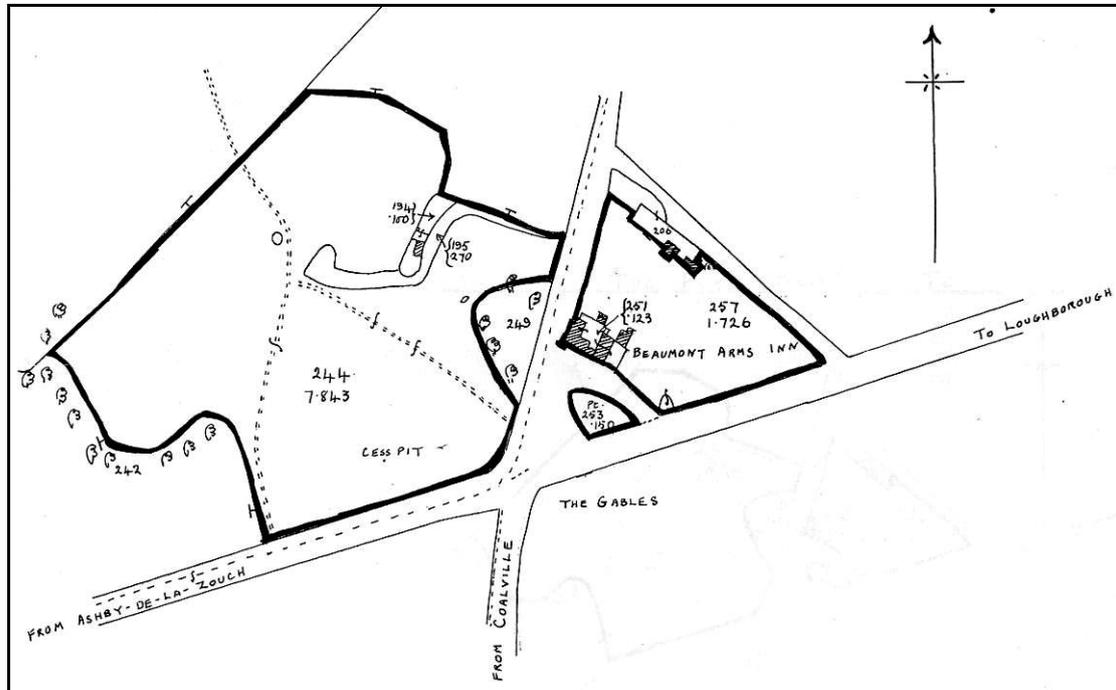


A COLEORTON PRIVATE ASYLUM



BY SAMUEL T STEWART - FEBRUARY 2022

PREFACE

A few people will know that there was once a "Workhouse" in Coleorton but it is unlikely that anyone will know about the existence of a "Private Lunatic Asylum" that existed there around 125 years ago and was used as such for around twelve years.

This was at the residence known as "The Gables / Gable House " located to the south eastern corner of Coleorton cross roads. It is believed to be a private residence still. It was once owned by the Beaumonts, and in fact was occupied for a number of years by the 11th Baronet and his wife during the period the Abel-Smith's were leasing and residing at Coleorton Hall from 1904 to 1925.

Two transcribed newspaper articles from 1907 and 1910 have been included to describe the Gables use at that time.

See front cover for location of the Gables relevant to the old Coleorton cross roads arrangement.

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Transcribed from Coalville Times - Friday 17 May 1907

UNLAWFULLY BOARDING LUNATICS AT COLEORTON.

SINGULAR PROSECUTION AT THE ASHBY POLICE COURT.

An unusual case was hoard by Major Hatchett and other magistrates at the Ashby Police Court on Saturday

Wm. Walker, an aged farmer, and Ada L. Walker his daughter, of Gable House, Coleorton, were charged with detaining lunatics on unlicensed premises on March 6th at Coleorton. contrary to the Lunacy Act.

Mr. Pearse appeared to prosecute for the Public Prosecutor and Mr. Joy, instructed by Messrs Fisher, Jesson and Wilkins, of Ashby was for the defendants.

Mr. Joy said he was sorry to bear that something in the nature of a collision had occurred while Miss Walker was driving to the court and she had been injured to such an extent that she would not be able to appear. The male defendant was present and it would be for the Bench to decide whether they would go on with the case. There was no objection to that.

Mr. Pearse said he did not object.

The he male defendant was then called and in answer to the charge said he was not guilty. After consulting his counsel, however, he pleaded guilty.

Mr. Pearse said the proceedings were instituted by the Lunacy Commissioners with the view of making the provisions of the Lunacy Act, which governed the care and management of lunatics, better known to the public.

The defendant and his daughter resided at the Gable House, Coleorton, and there had been living there for some time past as boarders, three persons who were lunatics within the definition of the Act.

That being so, there were certain technical formalities that should have been gone through to make it legal. Those formalities shortly were, that a certificate of two medical men should have been obtained and also the order of a magistrate. That was not done and the result was that the Lunacy Commissioners, who, in a sense, had the control and guardianship of persons of unsound mind, had no knowledge that these three people were at the house. Such knowledge on the part of the Commissioners was essential, having regard to the present state of the legislature. to obviate any mischief which might arise in cases of lunatics residing under circumstances which might be cruel or undesirable.

The defendants in this case had pleaded guilty and he thought it would be sufficient to meet the purpose of the prosecution if he selected one of the three persons and struck out of the summons any reference to the other two. He would accept the plea of guilty and with the consent or the Bench would withdraw a second charge under the same Act, it being really an alternative one. He repeated that the only object of the commissioners was to make the offence better known to public : they had no desire to press for a heavy penalty. There was no suggestion as far as he knew, that there had been any ill treatment or anything of that kind and was content to leave the case as to the question of penalty entirely in the hands of the magistrates.

Supt. Lockton formally proved the service of the summons on Miss Walker and said it was quite correct that she had, that morning, met with an accident and was unable to appear.

Mr. Pearse said he did not consider it necessary to give any evidence unless the Bench desired it.

The chairman said the Bench were of opinion that they should have some evidence as to the actual state of things, as at present they had not sufficient knowledge to guide them in arriving at a penalty. They wanted simply to know the facts.

John Edward Montagu Finch, a medical Supt. of the Borough Asylum, Leicester, stated that on an order of the Lord Chancellor, he visited Gable Home, Coleorton, on February 27th and March 6th., and there saw the two defendants. Mr. Walker said he was the tenant of the house, but he had no knowledge of any patients being there. Witness Miss Walker, then admitted the presence of patients, of whom she said she had the care entirely. She said she took payment for them and they were not certified.

Witness, examined three of the patients and came to the conclusion that they were of unsound mind and were lunatics within the definition of the Lunacy Act.

Mr. Joy : There were only three such persons?—There were four boarders, but only three were certifiable. The other was simple-minded. Did Miss Walker seem to be a capable woman and one who was doing her best for the patients? - Yes

Mr. Pearse : Can you form any idea as to how long these people had been there? Miss Walker told me herself it. was about nine years.—Witness added that he was told that the patient named in the charge, had been there nearly five years.

Mr. Joy said he appeared for both defendants and the first remark he wishes to make was one of gratitude to his friend for the prosecution for the light spirit in which the prosecution had been undertaken. It was not with the idea of obtaining punishment of the defendants but to draw the attention of the public to a branch of the law which, as he could readily satisfy the Bench, had not been much before the attention of the public. Dealing with the facts of the case, he said Mr. Walker's name was familiar to the Bench as he had lived in the district for many years. Formerly he was a farmer in fairly affluent circumstances, but since the death of his wife, and farming not being such a profitable occupation as it used to be, his circumstances were not as they once were. His daughter, who had had a considerable amount of medical training, came home to manage the house for her father and with the experience she had had, it occurred to her that she might with profit to herself and help to her father, take in boarders. Mr. Walker, beyond paying the rent of the house, had nothing to do with the treatment of any of the patients and possibly could not tell the Bench their names if he were asked. He (Mr. Joy) did not propose to give the names and would not enter into detail anymore than was necessary because, of course, it was painful to the relatives of these unfortunate people. A curious part of the case was that Gable House, which was extremely well adapted for the work, had been used for such without question since 1898. The patients were perfectly harmless, and there was not the slightest suggestion that they were likely to do harm to anyone or to themselves. He had letters showing how content the patients were and how satisfied the relatives were with their treatment. There had not been the slightest attempt at concealment or secrecy. A doctor had always been called in whenever required and other persons had regularly been going to the house ever since 1898 and it was not suggested by

anyone that there was anything in the conduct of the home contrary to the provisions of the Lunacy Act. The woman had no idea, until she received a surprise visit by Dr. Finch, that she was breaking any Act of Parliament. After that visit, she wrote to the Commissioners of Lunacy stating that if she had done anything wrong or contrary to the law, it was in ignorance and she regretted it. She gave Dr. Finch every information in her power and none of the patients had been looked upon by her as being insane. Every attention had been given the patients and she asked for advice what to do in the circumstances. Since writing that letter, Miss Walker had received the summons and had had no opportunity of taking further steps. That was the history of her case, and owing to an unfortunate accident that morning he was not able to call the defendant, but he could give a few letters from relatives of the patients regretting that there was a likelihood of the guardianship of the patients coming to an end.

Mr. Joy then read letters from relatives of each of the boarders all bearing testimony to the contentedness of the patients and the kindness and satisfactory treatment they had received and expressing the hope that they would be able to remain. There were three things he asked the Bench to take into consideration : (1) the house was peculiarly adapted for the carrying on of this work (2) defendant felt a sense of security in as much as she had carried it on quite openly since 1898, and (3) throughout the whole of the time, the treatment had been such as to endear both the patients and their relatives to Miss. Walker and they had expressed the desire that they should remain. That was the best testimony the woman could have and he could not do more than leave the matter with the Bench. But having regard to all the facts—the honesty and open way in which everything had been done—he suggested that the case would be met by the defendants paying the costs without having placed upon them the stigma - for stigma it was - of a conviction and fine.

Mr. Pearse said he must say a word on that. His friend had asked the Bench to dismiss the summons on payment of costs. That would involve the proposition that the offence was a trifling one and with that he did not agree. Though this offence was technical, it was a serious one, and while he did not suggest that the penalty should be high, he could not let the suggestion pass that there should be no penalty at all.

After the magistrates had consulted in private, the chairman (Major Hackett) said they had carefully considered the case and in view of the plea and all the circumstances they thought the case would be met if each defendant was fined £5 5s. and costs, one month in default. The costs in the two cases were £1 2s. 6d., making a total of £11 12s. 6d.

Transcribed from the Burton, Ashby & Coalville Guardian – December 17th 1910

The Gables Asylum – Private Asylum Patient's Death

The deputy coroner (Mr. Webb) of Loughborough conducted an enquiry at "The Beaumont Arms", Coleorton on Monday evening, touching the death of Mary Bolns, wife of Alfred Bolns, a gentleman of Bournemouthe. The deceased, it was stated, was a mental patient of "The Gables", Coleorton, occupied by Miss A. L. Walker.

On Friday night, the deceased on being asked to go to bed, threw herself down and sustained a fracture of the left arm. She died the next day.

Mr. Logan of Ashby de la Zouch gave evidence, and the jury returned a verdict of death from shock, due to injury. The deceased was 78 years of age and had been a patient at "The Gables" for 10 years.

1901 census details

William Walker	70	Widower	Farmer at home	Leamington, Warks
Ada L Walker	39	Daughter Single		Coleorton
Eleanor Walker	32	Daughter Single		Coleorton
Harry Deveron	20	Boarder Single	Living on own means - of Feeble Mind	Leamington, Warks
Kate Perry	29	Visitor		Exeter
Elizabeth Weston	16	Servant	General Domestic	Ashby - de - la - Zouch