



Warwick Town Council

Blue Plaque Unveiling

DR JOHN CONOLLY
1794-1866

Leading practitioner
in mental health care

Lived here



Dr John Conolly

John Conolly was born in Market Rasen in 1794, of Irish descent. His first employment was in the military. He then turned to medicine and graduated with an MD from Edinburgh University in 1821. By 1823 he was living in Stratford on Avon, where he stayed for five years.

During that time, he gained some experience in the mental health field by acting as inspecting physician for Warwickshire's private asylums. In

1827 he obtained a professorial post at London University. His growing interest in the study of mental disorder found expression in 1830, with the publication of 'An Inquiry into the Indications of Insanity', though it gained only limited attention at the time. At the end of 1830, Conolly resigned from the university and resumed general practice in Warwick.

During his time in Warwick, Dr Conolly was one of the physicians at the Warwick Dispensary in Castle Street and also lectured for the Mechanics Institution. He became one of the founding members of the Warwickshire Natural History and Archaeological Society in 1836 and remained the joint Honorary Secretary until he left Warwick.

In Pigot's 1835 Directory of Warwickshire John Conolly is listed as a Physician living in Theatre Street, Warwick. In 1839 he was appointed resident physician of the Middlesex County Lunatic Asylum at Hanwell. After visiting the Lincoln Asylum and seeing how the house surgeon Robert Gardiner Hill and Dr Edward Charlesworth had abolished all forms of mechanical restraint (including wrist locks, leg locks, straps and strait waistcoats), Conolly decided to implement the 'non-restraint' system at Hanwell.

Although not the originator, he was the one who demonstrated that this could be done effectively in a large pauper asylum with several hundred patients. Within a few years 'non-restraint' had become an accepted principle in the management of asylums and the treatment of mentally ill people, and Conolly was accorded much of the credit.

By the late 1840s he had left Hanwell and moved into private practice, which included involvement in several private asylums and acting as expert witness in criminal and civil court cases where matters of sanity or madness were in question. He was later an advisor to the developers of the Hatton Asylum, which opened near Warwick in 1852.

In collaboration with Sir Charles Hastings and Sir John Forbes, Conolly began a small medical association with the aim of improving provincial medical practice. This was called the Provincial Medical and Surgical Association, which later became the BMA.

John Conolly remained associated with the Middlesex Asylum until 1852, when he went into private practice and opened

his own small asylum in Hanwell. He died in Ealing in 1866.

Conolly's principles, based on his practical experience, were disseminated in two key publications, 'The Construction and Government of Lunatic Asylums' (1847) and 'The Treatment of the Insane Without Mechanical Restraints' (1856). These texts consolidated his position as one of the leading reformers in the field of mental health. Indeed, some contemporaries likened his achievements to those of people who were instrumental in the abolition of slavery.





LEOPOLD CLASSIC LIBRARY

The Construction and
Government of Lunatic Asylums
and Hospitals for the Insane

John Conolly



L. G. P. Jr.
AN INQUIRY

THE INDICATIONS
OR
INSANITY,

SUGGESTIONS FOR THE BETTER PROTECTION AND
CARE OF THE INSANE.

BY JOHN CONOLLY, M.D.
PROFESSOR OF MEDICINE IN THE UNIVERSITY OF LONDON.

LONDON:
PRINTED FOR JOHN TAYLOR,
BOOKSELLER AND PUBLISHER TO THE UNIVERSITY,
20, UPPER GOWER STREET.

MDCXXX.

444.



With many thanks to Dr Leonard Smith
(University of Birmingham) & Sue Rigby
(Warwick Blue Plaques Group)

Warwick Town Council
The Court House, Jury Street, Warwick, CV34 4EW

01926 411694