

## Meet the Local Associations

# 6: Portsmouth and District

by the Rev. Kenneth Parkinson

**D**URING nearly three years of life the Portsmouth and District Association for Mental Health has tried to interest as many people as possible within the City and its boundaries in the urgent task of building up the mental health of the community. Our white posters, cornered with green flashes: "Mental Health", have gradually infiltrated into public buildings and organisations and this wide and intensive advertising, aided by the valuable support of the *Portsmouth Evening News*, has been considered an essential task of the new association. Further publicity has been secured by Open Meetings and Brains Trusts dealing with mental health and illness in relationship to society as a whole, and by Annual Flag Days and other money-raising events. The Association has received much help from local Statutory bodies and other Voluntary associations and members of these serve on its Executive Committee. In fact, members of the Association only view their voluntary work as complementary to all that is done by the Statutory Health, Hospital and Welfare Services and work essentially in co-operation with them. It is significant that the first and present Chairman of the Association, Doctor Michael Eddings, has recently been elected to the newly formed Portsmouth Council of Social Service Executive Committee. Current projects of the Association, such as the support for a learner's swimming pool at an E.S.N. School and a psychiatric social club are also meant to achieve aims of the Statutory Bodies which for various reasons they cannot fulfil. Such partnership was present right at the foundation of the Association.

1960 was World Mental Health

Year and a Mental Health Week organised by the City's Health and Education services greatly helped to arouse interest and thought about the problems of mental health. A further stimulus was produced by a useful series of articles in the *Portsmouth Evening News* which described existing care in the city of the mentally sick, and how this would be related to the Mental Health Act of 1959 and what new strides forward were demanded. The conception and vision of community care of the mentally sick in the Act gave much scope to voluntary bodies prepared to work with the Statutory Services. Such was the background which produced the Steering Committee set up by Alderman J. P. D. Lacey, Chairman of the Health Services Committee of Portsmouth Corporation. Support for this was evident at a Public Meeting addressed by Mrs. H. Halpin from the N.A.M.H. Accordingly the Portsmouth Branch was inaugurated on July 13th, 1960.

### Educating public opinion

The initial interest and concern aroused in 1960 has been fed by a series of five public meetings held each Winter. These meetings, some of which have been lectures and some discussions, have aimed partly to dispel the fear and ignorance of mental disorder and partly to relate the problems of mental illness and its treatment to Society as a whole. The Association has heard lectures pinpointing the problems of mental disorder in different age groups such as "Guidance for Parents of Slow Learning Children" and more general ones such as "The Nature of Mental Disorder". An interesting experiment has been to hold three public discussions followed by questions from the audience.

The Treasurer of the Portsmouth Association, Mr. R. A. G. Goddard, presenting a cheque for £280 to the Lord Mayor at the opening of the new buildings of Cliffdale Junior School.

(Photograph by courtesy of "Portsmouth Evening News and Hampshire Telegraph")



The first of these on February 15th, 1962 was on "Common Frontiers in Medicine and Religion". This drew an audience of 250 people and the Bishop of Portsmouth was a member of the panel together with a Methodist Minister, a G.P. and a Consultant Psychiatrist. The next two discussions have been "Crime and Mental Sickness" and "Marriage: Make or Mend", the latter a joint meeting this year with the new Portsmouth Marriage Guidance Council. For those who wish to study the problems of the mind on a deeper level the Association in February and March 1962 ran, in conjunction with the Workers' Educational Association, an introductory course in psychology attended by 80 people. This keen interest has produced a three year course in Psychology which began last Autumn, tutored by Doctor L. R. C. Haward of Southampton University and sponsored by the W.E.A.: twenty attend the afternoon session, 50 to 60 the evening one.

### Welfare and social work

Although the response to study has been heartening, the Association tries all the time to stress practical service. The Executive Committee has decided on several occasions to give grants for children with some mental disorder or

in a family with a disordered member. A pupil at the Cliffdale E.S.N. Secondary School has been given financial help to enable him to continue with his schooling, without hardship, until the age of 16. Holidays have been given to two maladjusted children and travel expenses have been given to a mother to enable her to visit her mentally handicapped child regularly at a Special Hostel. One maladjusted and socially deprived boy has been given sports gear and other extras, his Headmaster dispensing the grant as necessary. At this year's Annual Conference of the N.A.M.H., the position of relatives looking after the mentally sick was eloquently pleaded and this Local Association is trying to ease this burden in at least two ways.

First, besides a baby-sitting service for parents with mentally subnormal children, a playgroup for severely subnormal children under school age has been started on Monday afternoons. This service aims to give a free afternoon to mothers of severely subnormal children and it is greatly appreciated. There was a wonderful response for voluntary helpers when the City was circulated. The children are collected and returned to their homes by volunteer car-drivers. Ten helpers look after the seven children at present in the group between 2 and

5 p.m. The group is kindly housed at St. Mark's Vicarage, North End and has received great assistance and equipment from a "Save the Children" playgroup which also meets there.

### Social Club

Secondly, besides thinking of mentally handicapped children, the Association also hopes to help former mentally sick patients with a Social Club, which should start this year. The Association received inspiration from the "Stepping Stones Club" at Bromley in Kent which two members visited, and also had much help and encouragement both from the City's Mental Health Department and from St. James' Psychiatric Hospital. Premises at Southdown House Cosham have been secured through the help of the City's Health Department and are now being decorated and furnished. The principle of the Club will be to have, if possible, more ordinary members than ex-patients so that the latter will secure real friendship and be integrated into the community. The Club will work in close co-operation with St. James' Hospital and the Health Department and will receive help from the Cosham Arts and Crafts Institute, whose members will give freely of their skills as demand requires. Help with hairdressing and flower-arranging groups has also been promised to the Club. It is hoped that it will meet each evening and be self-supporting. The success of the Club will depend greatly on the support of mentally healthy men and women prepared to give their time and enthusiasm to being full members of the Club and unobtrusively encouraging ex-patients whom they may not know to be such.

Mental affliction, however, may not be merely a temporary set-back in adult life which a social club may help to heal. It is often life-long and from its foundation the local Association has been concerned for those who will have to grow up into the life of the community with the disability of backwardness and subnormality. Disappointment felt when the cut in

Government expenditure resulted the deletion of the learners' swimming pool from the plans for the new Cliffdale E.S.N. Junior School Battenburgh Avenue, Portsmouth the Association, together with the Parent-Teacher Association of the School, to provide this valuable training aid voluntarily. The pool when it is built will be covered-in and heated and thus be useful all the year round. The cost is estimated at between £5,000 and £7,000. Within a year the Association has raised over £1,000 for the project; the Annual Flag Day produced nearly £500, the Lord Mayor's Charities at the Association's request gave £250 and early this year a concert in the Guildhall with Mr. Acker Bilk as the star and valuable support from the staff of Cliffdale School raised another £280. At the opening of the new Cliffdale School on March 13th of this year, the Association's treasurer, Mr. R. A. Goddard, presented to the Lord Mayor, Councillor E. O. Bateson, a cheque for £280 from the Concert. The Pool Fund now stands at about £1,400, the P.T.A. gradually building up the sum and hoping for a grant from the Education Committee.

Besides its Annual Flag Day, the Association also impinges on the City by its Annual Ball in November and by Coffee Mornings. All the time the Association is trying to bring together a group of people who care deeply for the mentally afflicted; a group prepared to rub shoulders all the time with those suffering mental disability through illness or birth; a group ready to learn from the experts in the psychological field and then prepared to baby-sit, cope with a playgroup, enter fully into a social club or visit mentally ill in their homes. Only such knowledge, practical zeal and deep concern can effect very slowly the community care of the mentally sick envisaged by the 1959 Act.

If you live in Portsmouth or district and would like to join this Association and forward its aims, please write to the Honorary Secretary, Mrs. Joy Metson, 31 Havant Road, Horndean, Hants. Telephone, Horndean 3270.