

# The conversion of Holloway Sanatorium

Jane Knowles

Holloway Sanatorium, named after the benefactor, Thomas Holloway, stands in beautiful grounds opposite Virginia Water railway station, Surrey.

Designed by William H. Crossland the central part (Fig. 1) was planned to look like the Cloth Hall at Ypres. Crossland had tried this design the previous year in the building of Rochdale Town Hall. The Great Hall was based on La Sainte Chapelle in Paris. Originally built between 1873–84, the sanatorium was opened by the Prince of Wales on 15 June 1885, who brought a party of friends over from the Ascot Races for the ceremony.

Holloway was an unusual self-made man who survived failure and bankruptcy (his mother had to pay for his release from prison after arrest for non-payment of adverts in *The Times*) and became a millionaire after marriage to the determined Jane Driver. His fortune was made out of pills whose only beneficial effect was to be slightly laxative.



Figure 1. Central hall of Holloway Sanatorium.

Despite this they sold in almost every country in the world. The marriage was childless and when Jane became seriously ill Holloway looked around for philanthropic schemes to commemorate her life.

The first scheme to attract him was a sanatorium for the insane. George III's madness had excited public opinion about the correct and humane treatment for the insane. A French idea that plain walls were obnoxious to the mad caught Holloway's imagination and so every inch of wall is richly decorated including portrayals of small devils amidst the florid design. The initials TH and JH figure in the ceiling designs of the entrance hall and his own especially designed coat of arms is celebrated in stained glass on the great stairway.

The second scheme, Holloway College for Young Ladies, was the one closest to Jane's heart. Sadly she died before its completion. Holloway also died before Queen Victoria opened the Chapel of the College and she seems to have been unaware that it was Holloway's brother-in-law on whom she bequeathed honours on this occasion and not the generous far-sighted man himself.

Nowadays all is changed at Holloway Sanatorium. Emptied of patients in 1990 the building's decay was rapid. Developers (Octagon) have bought the property on the basis that they faithfully restore the main building. Now the entrance hall, great stairway and main hall are repainted, an exact replica of the old. The dining hall, with its painted high beams is the swimming pool in a luxurious health centre. The Great Hall with its hammerbeam roof thought to be Crossland's masterpiece will become a community hall. The male and female wings are being restored to provide 23 three and four-storey town houses. Unless they can afford the £500 000 average for these houses, it is unlikely that many psychiatrists will walk these grounds again. A further 190 homes are built or planned in the grounds. The high walls, gate and security staff now operate to keep the unwelcome out.

Jane Knowles, *Consultant Psychotherapist, Winterborne House, 53–55 Argyle House, Reading RG1 7YL*