

The Scribe's Column

A Glossary for Reading Approval Reports

To express hostility tactfully avoids unduly offending susceptibilities. Those charged with writing obituaries for *The Times* who have 'De mortuis nil nisi bonum' over their desks obviously speak well of the deceased yet indicate the truth without upsetting anyone. They have mastered the art of tactful euphemism:—

'Fond of the convivial pleasures of life' = He was a drunkard.

'Never one to suffer fools gladly' = He was a boor and a bully.

'The ethos of classical Greece' = Homosexuality.

This ability to provide a discreet gloss occurs elsewhere. For a fashion editor:—

'Budget dresses for the mature fuller figure' = Cheap clothes for fat elderly women.

Estate agents, too, have this ability to find appropriate phrases for most contingencies, for example:—

'Unique and highly individual charm' = So grotty it is difficult to say anything else about it.

'A small but easily managed front garden' = The window box is on the pavement.

It is less well known that the Court of Electors have similarly evolved their own glossary of useful phrases to report on Approval Visits. It may be of interest to *Bulletin* readers to have some examples, to help them extract the quintessential implications from reports:—

'The trainees spoke very highly of the support they received from the Clinical Tutor' = They did not speak quite so highly of the other consultants.

'The trainees spoke very highly of the individual supervision given by the consultants' = What does the Tutor do?

'Not all consultants take an equal interest in training' = Some consultants are bone idle.

'Some consultants take an unusual interest in new and innovative approaches to treatment' = Some of the consultants are mad.

'The ethos of the Unit provides an idiosyncratic model of psychiatry' = All the consultants are mad.

'Further attempts should be made to resolve the

difficulties stemming from unresolved interpersonal problems' = The consultants are fighting: please stop.

'The psychologists had their separate professionalism' = All the psychologists wore pink shirts.

'We believe that the University Department of Psychiatry might be able to do more' = We could not find their ivory tower.

'The University Department of Psychiatry remains a centre of excellence' = They have collared most of the money and talent.

'Attention is drawn to the College's recommendations for changes in the Tutorship at appropriate intervals' = The Tutor is not doing his work but is hanging on to the money.

'At the time of the visit all of the training posts were filled by locums' = This is a disaster area and should have been unapproved (U).

'Most of the trainees were uncertain if they intended to pursue a career in psychiatry' = The trainees were used as pairs of hands, and if they had any sense and intended to train as psychiatrists they would look for a job elsewhere.

'Some of the books in the library were out of date' = If all those out of date books had been removed it would have been difficult to find the library.

'The distance from other centres made training difficult' = This hospital is so isolated that the training programme is not viable.

'Despite his many other commitments the previous Physician Superintendent retains an unusual interest and involvement in the training scheme' = Despite senility he has blocked all necessary changes for years.

Further examples of the tactful skills of the Court of Electors and visitors to hospitals and training schemes must have been noted by sharp-witted psychiatrists at other hospitals than Bedside Manor, from whose report many of the examples given here have been quoted. As my grandfather used to say 'Reading between the lines taxes the brain more than the eyes'.

EZRA THE SCRIBE

*With Approval Visiting Team 467
Bedside Manor Hospital
Outer Darkshire*