

Old Age & Dementia Care

Social, Cultural, Medical & Legal Considerations – Past & Present

A two-day symposium at Birkbeck, University of London

22-23 September 2020

Anxieties around how to care for a growing population of older people, especially those living with dementia, have preoccupied governments from the late 19th century. In some parts of the world, older people may have lived longer due to medical advances, and improved sanitation and housing. But many broke down physically, mentally, or both, due to a range of biopsychosocial reasons: poverty, malnutrition, isolation, inadequate housing, illness and poor health care.

As historian Pat Thane has observed, the way in which 'old age' is framed represents an 'expression of the value system of the community' in different historical and cultural settings. (Thane: 2003, 98) In this two-day, cross-disciplinary symposium, we draw on the latest scholarship to consider how such value systems have been expressed, and how they have influenced social care, medical treatment, and the legal rights of older people living with dementia, past and present. We will also reflect on how the humanities and social sciences can provide new insights to inform policy and practice. Some issues we might expect to address from a range of historical, contemporary and cultural perspectives include:

- Notions and definitions of the relationship between dementia and 'old age' in different times and places
- The social value attributed to older people with dementia, including those unable to live independently
- Stigma and its effects on carers and the 'cared for'
- Meanings and practices of care as paid work, as voluntary work and/or family responsibility, and as state or medical intervention/non-intervention
- Ageing, care work (paid and unpaid), and im/migration
- Ageing and dementia care in people's own homes, in nursing homes, hospitals, asylums, workhouses and prisons
- Health inequalities, ageing, and dementia
- Notions of self-hood, identity, and categories of division and difference in ageing and dementia care
- End-of-life care in institutions and at home
- Artistic, creative and media depictions of old age and dementia

- Shifting socio-legal discourses around older people and dementia, including issues relating to ethics, mental capacity and consent
- Older people, dementia and 'rights' movements

Confirmed speakers include: Elizabeth Barry, Mary Donnelly, Claire Hilton and Pat Thane. If you would like to give a 20-minute paper, please submit five key words, an abstract of up to 200 words and a brief bio to Louise Hide and Janet Weston at OldAgeAndDementia@gmail.com by 27 April 2020.

Pat Thane, 'Social Histories of Old Age and Aging', *Journal of Social History*, 37.1 (2003), 93-111.