

Memories of life in a mental institution

A FORMER child patient in a mental health unit in the 1970s has written a novel based on his experiences there.

David Austin
(pictured) was admitted to Merrifield Children's Unit, at the former Tone Vale, as a 12-year-old with depression.



His book, *Delivered Unto Lions*, calls on his memories of becoming an adolescent surrounded by other disturbed children.

Mr Austin said the novel realistically reflects his time at Tone Vale, which closed in the 1990s as part of the Care in the Community scheme and was replaced by the village of Cotford St Luke.

He added: "I've changed personal details and situations to protect identities but it's closely based on things I witnessed or personally experienced.

"I left Somerset many years ago but, as part of my research, I went back and visited Cotford St Luke, part of which stands where Merrifield used to be.

"It's a beautiful new village but there's nothing left of Merrifield now - you wouldn't know it was ever there."

He recalls his time at Merrifield as "very unhappy" but still considers himself to be one of the lucky ones.

He said: "Other kids I knew suffered far more than I did.

"And, thanks to some internet forums, I know of people whose entire lives have been very badly affected by their memories of this type of institution."