

## Lunacy and the Poor Law, at home and abroad...

From *Poems*. By The Rev. George Crabbe, LL.B. Fourth edition. 1809. See *The Village*:

*'Theirs is yon House that holds the Parish Poor, Whose walls of mud scarce bear the broken door; There, where the putrid vapours flagging, play, And the dull wheel hums doleful through the day; — There Children dwell who know no Parents' care; Parents, who know no Children's love, dwell there; Heart-broken Matrons never wed ; Dejected Widows with unheeded tears, And crippled Age with more than childhood-fears ; The Lame, the Blind, and, far the happiest they ! The moping Idiot and the Madman gay. ... Here too the Sick their final doom receive, ...'*

Crabbe's graphic description of people living in a mud-built paupers' Poor House, in a post Napoleonic wartime parish, 1601 poor-law' provision — for indigent sick and healthy alike. *Managing The Poor*.

In an old 17th c. Churchwardens' Parochial Account Book (Poor Law Relief Book) discovered within a respectable (but poor parish), Southern English parish church of Cowden, is recorded in an early entry; after passing of the 1601 Elizabethan Poor Law. ( *Sussex Archaeological Collections*. Vol XX. (1868) *Ancient Parochial Account Book Of Cowden*, pp.91-119.. By the Rev. Edward Turner, M.A., V.P. p.101. & 108.):

*' 1627 Item, paid for an almse house — — £14 0s 0d ; Item, paid for boodes, and repairing the said house — — 0. 19s. 6d The almshouse (aka poor house) frequently needed repair, being mostly constructed of mud, straw and boodes (wood planks?) ... '1654. Item. Paid at several times when the smallpocks was in the Almshouses, 12s 8d ....'*

These descriptions contrast with the more secure, (probably better fed inmates) stone built *House of Industry* (for malingering poor), *House of Correction*, and *Prison* — with alternative *transportation* abroad to then previous American colonies, or New South Wales via Botany Bay. But, after the *1834 Poor Law Amendment Act*, larger brick-built Workhouses became the norm, alongside, converted previous but ruined large (for e.g. ;) old Tudor Manor Houses, as the Westhampnett Union Workhouse of West Sussex. All those small poor houses, and, large built asylum workhouses, held paupers — sick and elderly. No duty of care. Many non-classified inmates housed with criminals and innocent alike — before The Law and its Courts — condemned for being poor.



St Mary's Hospital, Almshouse, in Chichester, West Sussex: established 1171 and still in use today, administered by the Diocese of Chichester.

Source: Postcards dated 1908, see also Dr Rotha Mary Clay. 1909

From mud Poor House, to palatial built caring Asylum — or Snake Pit  
and prison if neglected



The 'Old Workhouse' (long since demolished) was situated on the east side of Fletching Street, in Fletching, East Sussex, 1814

An old, parish Fletching workhouse, in East Sussex; earthen floor, timbered frame, wattle and daub (a mixture of woven wood and mud), and thatch. Poor houses became Workhouses, when work for able inmates became compulsory. The Reverend Edward Turner, a then contemporary Overseer Guardian of the Poor, recalled, in the late 18th century, seeing cottagers engaged in spinning tow and yarn, and producing linen (Cottage Industry).

The small parish poor houses, of the early and mid 19th century, were replaced by large brick built lunatic asylums and large Union Workhouses in Europe and the (then) American Colonies from the mid 19th Century. (Source: Ancient Account Book of Cowden, Rev. E. Turner S.A.C. 1868: drawing above by The Viscount Pevensey — later, 2nd Earl of Sheffield, in 1814: Source, *Danehill Parish Historical Society Magazine* Vol. 1, No. 12 (Jan 1982). *The Effect of the Poor Law System on Sussex Rural Life, Part I*, p.4, by Leonie Davenport, with assistance from Mrs Hilda M Rawlings (of Danehill).) For extra bibliography on the subject, see *Building in England Down to 1540* by LF Salzman, FSA. pp 82-102

Before the mid 1850s, all sick, poor, and able-bodied paupers — whatever their ailments — were often herded together in the small almshouses, and localised parish poor houses. In the USA, the custom grew of 'placing the poor on the auction block, like so many chattel slaves' — all sold to the lowest bidder (Deutsch, 1937, pp117).

In the UK, there were no formal provisions (only laws), the sick poor were the responsibility of their parish; sick lunatics were either deemed potentially vicious and dangerous; to be then placed in a custodial prison institution — or, if not, deemed harmless and placed, for minimum care, in the local Union Houses, with little division of needs (Deutsch, 1937).

## *Lest We Forget...*



In the UK, The Essex Lunatic Asylum, built 1853. Later renamed as *Warley Hospital Brentwood*; Picture shows the main building. The hospital closed down in 2001.

Source: Postcard date stamped 1921

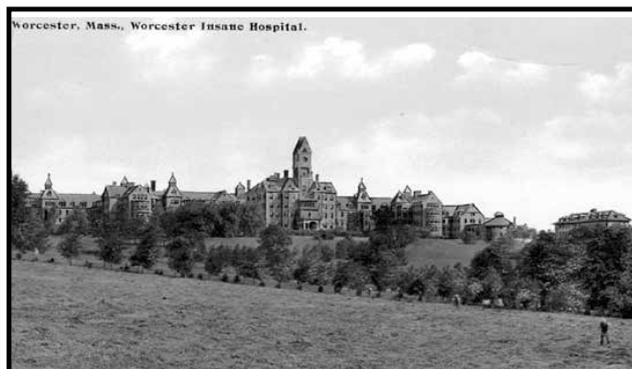


Northern Illinois Hospital for the Insane, Elgin, USA.

Photo taken from postcard date stamped 1908.

Worcester Insane Hospital, Worcester, Massachusetts, USA.

Photo taken from postcard date stamped 1921.



The palatial 'architecture' of American and UK state/county pauper asylums was almost identical from the 1850s to the 1950s. The water tower and butterfly maps (or corridor) system division of males and females was identical — but layout and makeup of hospital administration, and their staff, differed widely between the USA and the UK. *Ghostly Ruins America's Forgotten Architecture*, by Harry Skrdla, 2006

Ohio State Hospital for the Insane, (Milledgeville) USA. Photo taken from early 20th century postcard. Text on rear reads:

“This is where we were the other day and, all over the front part of the building, saw some of the folks who were almost well. There were about 800 men on the grounds, sitting, and most looked so ill; it made us feel so sad to see so many”



Ohio Lunatic Asylum, established in 1835 and opened in 1838. The Georgia Lunatic Asylum at *Milledgeville* established in 1837 and opened in 1842. And 'In Pennsylvania, the department for the insane in the first American general hospital was removed to a site in West Philadelphia in 1841 as a separate institution, and renamed the Pennsylvania Hospital for the Insane. (*The Mentally Ill in America*. p140. Albert Deutsch. Published 1937).

*Ohio* had a good report (as it were): *Milledgeville* — a mixed written report in 1952 by Dr Peter G. Cranford (unknown to the public) a detailed honest history had been written of this massive 'warehouse' of 12,000 patients (in 1951), and frequent staff attempts to sort out its problems — but always subdued by toxic politicians, sacking good medical Superintendents' in their efforts to reform. The Hospital's nebulous social history, was not published till 1981. (*Milledgeville! Inside Story of the World's Largest Insane Asylum*. Dr Peter G. Cranford. 1952)

Cranford said, Superintendent Dr Green's early *Milledgeville* Asylum administration (1845-1874), after the Confederate South lost the war found there was no supporting state funds and since the Northern Union's General Sherman had burnt all in his wake, the 200 plus, hospital staff and patients were left to starve: there was little to no official backing and *all his staff* were unqualified, and equally dependent caring attendants — unpaid negro slaves. (One of his first acts of compassion as Superintendent Dr Green was to formally abolish all forms of restraint.)

At the end of the Civil War in 1863, the Asylum, with no income whatever was saved by the valiant Doctor Green who managed to beg of a sympathetic federal Major-General Wilson, who was in charge at the time : and saved the building and its dependent vulnerable residents. The asylum housed both sexes (who were separated), including dumped idiots, epileptics, and unwanted pauperised seniles. Admitted patients were both white, and black insane (separated by law).

It is notable that all state and public pauper asylums, between 1850 and 1914, were palatial, including the architectural feature of large, central water towers. The patients' wards were based on the 'butterfly' plan of males one side, females the other.

From the early 1900s to the 1920s, public picture postcards were produced depicting these large, stark edifices, and the similarities quite striking, both throughout the UK and the Americas.

From the mid 1850s, up until the first world war, little public copy appears to have survived on the day to day care of people branded lunatics in Europe or the USA, and none is apparent from the far east.

The very word 'Asylum' has always been popular in commercial media, including the arts, and depicted mostly as a 'bottomless pit' of gothic horrors, demonising *all* staff and patients — and their methods of care, ad nauseum...

One English writer, Ford Madox Ford, writing of his experience of the horrors of World War One (trench life, etc.) said: "If you overstate horrors you induce in your reader a state of mind such as, by reacting, causes the horrors (Conrad, *The horror, the horror*) to become matters of indifference. If you overstate heroisms, you induce indifference to heroisms — of which the late war produced. Heaven knows, plenty enough, so that to be indifferent to them is villany." (*No More Parades*, by Ford Madox Ford, Dedication, 1925 ppvi-vii)

In the wake of World War One, The Great Depression, and World War Two, in the UK and the USA, immense progress was made by luminaries in most asylums (hospitals) despite a robust increase in demography and a real paucity in investment. And little improvement in the architecture. One inevitable result was the serious overcrowding, as well as gross neglect of the hospital estates.

Just ten years later, 1948, WW2 over, and Deutsch, exposed a rife existing, catalogue of illustrated proven horrors, held within certain American State Lunatic Asylums; evidence of gross neglect and implicit cruelty of its country's most vulnerable citizens. (*The Shame of the States*, by Albert Deutsch, 1948 )

Cranford, in his 1952 report on Milledgeville, USA, stated: "Only 15 medical staff (what grades?) for almost 10,000 patients... with a few nurses and many (unqualified) attendants..." (Milledgeville, Ohio, report (1941-1944) pp 86-87). On wartime, Cranford said: "On a massive scale, staff, buildings, equipment and administration; policy and treatment were seriously deficient" (Cranford, 1944-1948, pp104). In his diary, on July 10th, 1951, he wrote: "Hospital Farm of 132 acres — to feed 12,000 patients and 2,000 attendants... whole hospital estate covered 3,000 acres"

Entering The Nuclear Age, in 1945, fenced *within* the secret confines of the Manhattan Atom Bomb project, at Oakridge, Tennessee, segregated 'hutments' were allocated to 1,500 member black population with dirt floors, coal stoves and no glass windows. (Living conditions norm in the deep South.) "Black married couples could not live together until after the war, and there were no schools for their children until 1946." (*Picturing The Bomb.* Fermi & Samra. Published. Abrams. 1995. p.58-59.)

A full century would pass, after the death of Abraham Lincoln, before the Civil Rights 1960s movements removed legal bias of institutionalised racism as day to day *normal* American way of life. As late as WW2, so-called 'Jim Crow' institutionalised racism was experienced, as hostile Americans, black and white, often fought amongst themselves, at home — and in Europe. And, in the United States, hospital asylums issues of division, that existed during the 19th century, prevailed for some time after the war.

## Lest We Forget.....

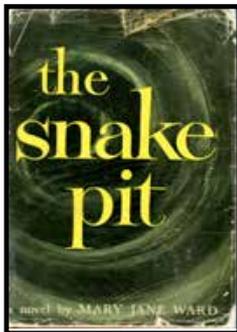


**U.S.A.1946. Byberry Hospital.** 'The male "incontinent ward" was like a scene out of Dante's inferno. Three hundred nude men stood, squatted and sprawled in this bare room, amid shrieks, groans, and unearthly laughter. These represented the most deteriorated patients. Winter or Summer, these creatures never were given any clothing at all. Some lay about on the bare floor in their own excreta. (*The Shame of the States* by Albert Deutsch, p.49. Publ. New York by Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1948) Photos by Charles Lord

## 1946: USA State Asylums



**BEDLAM 1946: (Above)** 'Tubercular Mental Patient in Cleveland is strapped to his bed. Such devices are often used because of lack of sufficient attendants.' (American 'Life Magazine'... May 6th 1946 — Bedlam 1946 pp110.)



**U.S.A. 1947.** *The Snake Pit* a book by journalist Mary Jane Ward was based on personal experience of American state asylum hospitals. And influential Oscar winning film of that title in 1948. America soon began to breakup its deprived mammoth postwar populated hospitals (e.g. 10,000 plus beds)

(Front Cover, 1st Edition, 1947)

**Top Left:** Byberry Hospital 1946 (the Philadelphia State Hospital), Pennsylvania, USA; existed 1910 — 1990 and demolished 2006. one of many American state mental hospitals, which experienced substantial 'Enquiries' during their turbulent existence. At its closure, it had 50 buildings on site — with, at one time, 6500 patients and 1300 staff. In the wake of the 1940s these 'warehouse' public asylums were reformed.....

**Top Right:** In Cleveland State Mental Hospital, Ohio, USA — during the 1940s, grossly understaffed.

Photos by Charles Lord; Considerable data is available in the public domain of the World Wide Web, in the 2000s.

**Lest We Forget...** 1945: Germany, Europe



## GERMANS DESTROYED GERMANS HERE

KAUFBEUREN (Bavaria), Wednesday.

**A** NAZI extermination camp, where hundreds of allegedly mentally deficient or deformed Germans were still being destroyed, was discovered here two days ago by American Army authorities.

Every inhabitant of this little town must have been aware of the fact that human beings were being systematically killed, but neither perpetrators nor collaborators seemed in any way conscious of a sense of guilt.

The chief nurse, who confessed that she had murdered "approximately" 210 children in two years by intra-muscular injection, asked: "Will anything happen to me?"

**Out of bounds**

The camp, operating as a lunatic asylum, had a maximum capacity of 3,000 persons and received orders from the Reich and Bavarian Ministries of the Interior. Experiments were made there "for the improvement of the race."

"Out of bounds" signs and "lunatic asylum" notices abounded.

The primary methods practised at Kaufbeuren, and at a branch institute at Irtsee, were scientifically directed starvation and the administration of chemicals.

Poisoning was carried out by intra-muscular injection of scopolamine, and by doses of luminal or veronal given in the drink. The patient normally died usually on the and re

Taken from a British daily newspaper, the 'News Chronicle', July 5th 1945 edition, page 1. On eugenics, euthanasia and dehumanisation; racist extermination of non-Aryans. (Also refer to Vol 1 index.)

Europe and the USA produced many notables in the field of asylum psychiatry, during the 18th, 19th and 20th century: to name a few — Adler, Binet, Connolly, Dix, Esquinol, Freud, Griesinger, Kraepelin, Jaspers, Jung, Pinel, Rush, Taft, Tuke, et al: but, with the rise and fall of Nazification in Europe: eugenics, mass genocide, involuntary euthanasia and racism during the 1930s and 1940s, decimated most occupied European countries' hospitals and asylums, the caring of the mentally ill and disabled — and, only sustained corrupted 'politic', so-called asylums and hospitals (concentration camps)... Reforms took place immediately after the Wars devastation.

Source Ref: *Mental Health Services in Europe, provision and practice*. Edited by Neil Brimblecombe and Peter Nolan, 2012.