

Psychiatry in pictures

CHOSEN BY ROBERT HOWARD

Do you have an image, preferably accompanied by 100 to 200 words of explanatory text, that you think would be suitable for Psychiatry in Pictures? Submissions are very welcome and should be sent direct to Professor Robert Howard, Box 070, Institute of Psychiatry, London SE5 8AF, UK.

Miss Theodora Weston (photograph taken 30 August 1895)

Between the mid-1880s and 1890s, photographs were taken of over 300 Bethlem patients by hospital staff. Resident medical students, clinical assistants and attendants took the pictures during the course of their work around the hospital. Prints of many of the photographs were included in an album as well as pasted into patients' individual medical records. Viewing the photographs together with the corresponding case histories is a moving experience and opens a window onto the lives of otherwise forgotten individuals. Theodora Weston, aged 23, was admitted on 28 July 1894. The doctor's certificate completed by Dr Thomas Shawe, Medical Superintendent of the London County Council Asylum at Banstead, outlined the reasons for her admission as follows: 'She is in a state of dementia and will scarcely reply to my questions. She says however that she asked if her food at dinner today was poisoned. The aspect yesterday when I saw her was one of suspicion and her manner very reticent. I consider her dangerous to herself. She is restless and wanders about. I am informed by her sister, Miss Ruth Weston, that she has hallucinations, fancying that people are outside to whom she makes signals and with whom she converses. That she required the windows to be closed to prevent people coming in to seduce her. Also that she has tried to leave the house early to go and meet people that she could hear whistling to her. That she refuses food under the idea that it is poisoned'. In the weeks that followed admission, she refused food and was fed through a nasal tube but she became increasingly withdrawn so that she was described as 'now quite demented' in her case notes in May 1895. She was discharged 'uncured' to a private lunatic house in Peckham.



In the photograph, taken around the time of her discharge, she is wearing the hospital's 'strong clothing' which was difficult to remove without assistance or to tear. Photographs and case histories of over 60 similar cases can be found in *Presumed Curable: An Illustrated Casebook of Victorian Psychiatric Patients in Bethlem Hospital* by Colin Gale and Robert Howard (Petersfield: Wrightson Biomedical, 2003). The original photographs are in the Bethlem Royal Hospital Archives and Museum.