

Glenside Hospital Museum

The information below has been taken from <http://www.glensidemuseum.org.uk/>. This page talks about events leading up to the building of Glenside. The patients that first resided at Glenside Hospital came from St. Peter's, by St. Peter's Church that is now in Castle Park.

Read through the passage below.

What can you find out about the conditions at St Peter's?

Consider the difference between describing someone as 'behaving foolishly' as opposed to 'being a fool'. The first just describes behaviour and the second labels the person. Which do you think is more acceptable and why?

Can you find examples of language that would not be acceptable today? What terminology would we use instead and why do you think that is the case?

History of Psychiatry in Bristol

1: St Peter's Hospital

In 1827 there were three lunatic wards. Ward 14 (Bedlam, female) Ward 16 (Upper Bedlam, female) and Ward 20 (Bedlam male). In 1839 "paupers were mixed with lunatics, whether imbecile or violent with little or no protection" and "the present sleeping room for the lunatics was more likely to engender disease than to cure it, for a more melancholy department the writer has never seen." The population of Bristol continued to expand rapidly. The conditions in St Peter's could scarcely have been worse. In 1844 the Lunacy Commissioners inspected all the mad houses and asylums in the country and expressed "almost unqualified censure" on 32 existing institutions. They described St Peter's unequivocally as "totally unfit for an asylum." They recommended that the entire body of lunatics ought to be moved to more spacious premises and to more healthy and airy situation. In their 1847 report the Commissioners in Lunacy reported that 27 of the 64 patients admitted to St. Peter's in the previous 13 months had died. They considered that "this mortality appears considerable." They recorded the failure of their repeated attempts to persuade the Guardians to provide suitable accommodation and concluded that "the wards and yards at present set aside for the Insane Poor of Bristol are totally unfit for the purpose" that "the present arrangement is utterly discreditable and unless the Corporation takes measures for its amendment, the condition of the Insane Poor of Bristol will require the intervention of some higher authority."

Finally in March 1857, Fishponds was approved as the site of a new asylum. J. R. Lysaght, a local architect of Imperial Chambers, Bristol was commissioned to produce the plans. Work began tardily in 1858 and proceeded slowly. When the first patients were transferred from St Peter's to Fishponds in March 1861, the building work was still incomplete.

Read the passage below.

In what ways was Glenside Hospital an improvement on St. Peter's?

History of Psychiatry in Bristol

Bristol Lunatic Asylum and its enlargement



The new asylum

The medical appreciation of the new asylum in the annual reports was almost unbridled. There can be no doubting the genuine happiness of Dr Stephens in observing the effect of the “light airy and cheerful residence” which greeted his patients on transfer from St Peters. On February 27th 1861 “a boon to suffering humanity” was delivered when 50 men from St Peters Hospital were transferred. Six days later 63 women joined them. Dr Stephens’ regime was liberal. He stressed the importance of employment, the intention of which was to benefit the patients more than to provide gain for the hospital. He disapproved of mechanical restraint which was not employed nor was the straight waistcoat.

Dr Stephens over time tried to improve the social organisation of the hospital. There were country outings, Summer picnics, evening gatherings and dances, sometimes attended by visitors from outside the hospital together with ladies and gentlemen members of the family or friends of the officers who provided cheerful evenings “with comic songs, readings, recitations and humorous scenes in character, songs and lyrical pieces varied by overtures and other lively music performed on the pianoforte by the ladies and much enjoyed by the large numbers of patients.” A pianoforte to be used in the Chapel or Hall had been presented by the Chairman of the Committee of Visitors.

If there is enough time, read the passage below and identify problems that occurred with this new hospital. Notice the outdated procedures and again, the language that reflects this now unacceptable attitude.

By 1863 the asylum had been filled with patients much more quickly than was anticipated and a new extension for 15 males and 20 females was completed during 1868.

Mr George Thompson L.R.C.P. London, of the West Riding Wakefield Asylum took over from Dr Stephens on the 19th May 1871. Excess of admissions over discharges and deaths crept up relentlessly by ten per cent per annum so that by 1872, the place was 'inconveniently overcrowded' and further extensions for 60 male and 60 females were completed by 1878. These extensions and increase in patient numbers made the existing dining hall and chapel too small for the hospital. A new church, now the Glenside Museum, was opened for worship in August 1880.

Numbers continued to increase and more extension were needed. By the end of 1888 the 2 large wings (2 x 117 patients) and 2 small wings (2 x 42 patients) were finished. Temporary offices, stores, kitchens etc were provided in 1889 to replace the administration block, which was demolished in 1890. The chaos surrounding the demolition and reconstruction of the central block was unimaginable. This entailed a massive upheaval including Dr Thompson having to vacate his hospital house and find outside accommodation whilst bemoaning "the extensive pulling down and building up." In his last, sad annual report he wrote of the admission of a more and more hopeless class of patient which included 16 general paralytics, 15 epileptics over 60 years of age and 7 congenital idiots. Of the hospital population of 508 patients he considered that "out of this vast concourse of effete (*no longer capable of effective action*) human material, there are altogether 15 cases which present a reasonable prospect of recovery."



Write a brief summary of the history of Glenside Hospital. Include information about conditions at St. Peter's before Glenside was built, in what ways Glenside was an improvement on St. Peter's, but how it soon became overrun.

Consider what language would be appropriate when describing the patients and their treatments.