

BETHLEM

MUSEUM OF THE MIND

Research Guide One:

Patient Casebooks



Casebooks

Casebooks are the ancestor of the current NHS patient record, the most comprehensive record of a patient's situation, wellbeing and treatment that the Hospital kept. They were updated regularly to reflect patient progress and were held by the Hospital for posterity should they be required later for either medical reference or research- we don't think anyone thought they would be looking for relatives in them over a hundred years later!

Both Bethlem Royal Hospital and Croydon Mental/Warlingham Park Hospital kept casebooks until just after the Second World War, when they were replaced by larger, bulkier, filing systems which have not survived in the same way. If your ancestor was in either institution at that time, or in the Maudsley Hospital from 1923, there may be information we hold, but it will not be as detailed as that contained in a casebook. Please get in touch with us and we can go through the next steps.

Bethlem Casebooks

The patient casebooks for Bethlem Royal Hospital, held under our series reference CB (see <https://archives.museumofthemind.org.uk/CB.htm>), have information going back to the late 1700s, however they appear to have only been created when the Hospital moved to its second site on St George's Fields in Southwark in 1815. Earlier information is often hearsay or second-hand reporting. For example the casebook entry for Hugh Davies, who was admitted in 1799 and the transferred to the 'incurable' wing, includes as much information as the 'oldest attendant' can remember in 1815.

We know at least one of the Bethlem medical staff (Bryan Crowther, the Surgeon up to his death in 1815) kept detailed records of patients- these records became the basis of Dr William Black's 'A Dissertation on Insanity' in 1810, which heavily references Bethlem. It seems that up to 1815 doctors may have kept records, but these were private records of those doctors. None has survived to us in the archives here.

These earliest casebooks were divided according to the type of patient- criminal and incurable (which here means 'long-term' rather than unrecoverable) patients received their own series, held under our reference CBC (<https://archives.museumofthemind.org.uk/CBC.htm>). The 'regular' patients at Bethlem were then divided up according to the doctor treating them. These could be exceptionally brief- a couple of sentences on the condition of the patient when they entered, then some very brief (and sometimes impenetrable) medical notation on their progress is not untypical. The notes of Drs Tuthill and Morison are usually rather more detailed than those of Dr Monro, whose methods were revealed to be out of date by the report into the Hospital in the 1840s. The criminal and incurable casebooks follow the same pattern- if you are interested in the criminal patients, details of their crimes are held in the Criminal patient admission registers held under our reference ARD (<https://archives.museumofthemind.org.uk/ARD.htm>)

The arrival of Dr William Charles Hood in 1852 coincides with more standardised casebooks, which remain divided but from this point between male and female patients. While it takes a little while to find the lasting template, the entries start to consist of three sections.

The first covers the background and condition of the patient entering the Hospital, and usually repeats information found in the patients petition to enter Bethlem. These were the petitions received by the Governors that were used to judge whether a patient was suitable to be admitted to Bethlem, which was the method of entrance to the Hospital from at least as far back as we have Minute Books (the 1550s), though our holdings of these records only start for most patients in 1815 under our reference BAP (see <https://archives.museumofthemind.org.uk/BAP.htm> for details). Sometimes there is additional information (sometimes hints on the family members) in these petitions, but for the most part the content is pretty faithfully transferred.

The second section is an assessment of the patient made by the Hospital, we think on admission (or as close as possible). This examines and records the patients symptoms, and uses a proforma to assess their health. There is an emphasis on hereditary matters, but also a summary of what the medical staff have observed themselves of the patient's behaviour and symptoms- sometimes it does not match the condition reported in the first section.

The third part of the case notes is the patient's progress notes. These are always made by a doctor, who usually signs off the entries. The first note is a description of the doctor's first impressions of the patients, and the notes that follow record how the patient is progressing in the hospital (often referring to show that there has been 'good progress' or 'no change'), and sometimes make reference to any 'additional' treatment like sedation (usually drugs) or extra care needed.

As we move closer to the twentieth century this section sometimes features photographs of the patients, letters to and from them, and even examples of things like patient's writing. The doctors at the Hospital seem to have wanted to keep any evidence of their mental state. Here the patient's voice, sometimes in the grip of a very serious illness, can be heard in a way it simply can't be in some of our other records.

After 1919 the BAP admission papers become correspondence files, holding a small file of correspondence for each patient admitted into the Hospital. While these files can range from only holding the admission papers (simply an updated version of the petition) or bundles of letters from between the patient, their family and the Hospital, often this information is not replicated in the casebook. These files have not been digitised, but the earlier ones can be accessed by appointment in the archives.

The Bethlem casebooks extend up to 1948 when it merged with the Maudsley and entered the NHS.

Croydon Mental Hospital/Warlingham Park Hospital

Unlike Bethlem, when Croydon opened in 1903 there was a standardised set of best practice for record keeping in mental health facilities, and almost 60 years of those standards being adhered to. Part of the role of the Commissioners of Lunacy, later replaced by a Board of Control dealing with mental health matters. These bodies had a responsibility to ensure that public mental health institutions kept their records in a suitable fashion.

The Hospital was set-up by the Metropolitan Borough of Croydon in order to provide mental health services for its residents, and so therefore its patients are drawn almost exclusively from that area. Before it was established, Croydon had paid private Hospitals (such as Fisherton House) or other municipal asylums (most frequently those in Surrey) to house patients. There are two runs of casebooks- those for normal admissions under our reference CWA (<https://archives.museumofthemind.org.uk/CWA.htm>) and private patients under CWB (<https://archives.museumofthemind.org.uk/CWB.htm>). The later case records of the Hospital are held under CWC (<https://archives.museumofthemind.org.uk/CWC.htm>). Unfortunately, because these are arranged by the date of departure from the Hospital we have been unable to open them, as we cannot be entirely sure all the patients within them have passed away, thus removing concerns about disclosure of sensitive personal information.

However, the information held is very similar. While there are only two sections, the first is effectively an amalgamation of the first two parts of the Bethlem casebooks. While Bethlem patients were admitted by petition, the Croydon patients were admitted by medical certificate, signed by two doctors. This information, the background of the patient, and the details of an initial inspection is transcribed in the book in a proforma.

The second section is progress notes. While there is more regular photography of the patients than Bethlem, I've not come across any further notes or attachments. This means that while the information is often more descriptive than in the Bethlem records, there is no viewpoint other than the medical staff on display. This section is often longer than the Bethlem casebooks, as patients in Croydon often remained in the Hospital for a lot longer.

Note about using casebooks

When using these records we advise all our researchers that these casebooks are medical records that reflect the common practice and terminology of the time. Therefore both the language and the tone are very different to what we would expect today. The casebooks capture the experience of people going through very serious illnesses, and can contain distressing and graphic details.

Find My Past

Find My Past has digitised all our Bethlem casebook, admission and discharge and death books up to 1919, and all the Bethlem Board of Governors meetings up to 1683 (when the admission records begin). These are the records where we would expect to find most of the surviving information about patients at the Hospital up until this time. They have also digitised the records of Croydon Mental Hospital/Warlingham Park Hospital up to 1914.

While Find My Past is a subscription based website, if you are able to get to somewhere that has free access (or if you have a subscription yourself) you can see admission records, patient casebooks, and staff records for Bethlem and Warlingham Park yourself. You may also be able to get a free trial by signing up to them for a limited period. We offer free access at the Museum via the NHS wifi.

Once you have done this, go to www.findmypast.co.uk and select 'A-Z' of record sets. From here, use the free text box to search for 'Bethlem'- this will bring up two results. The one with the most records (about c.250,000) is the indexed text search, and the one with less records (c.130,000) is the browsing data set. If you are looking for a name, select the indexed set.

All the records of the Maudsley, and the later records of the other two Hospitals are currently closed under provisions of the Data Protection Act.

Data Protection and Contact Us

The casebooks, like all our patient records, are full of sensitive personal information about multiple patients. Therefore we have to close these records to public access if there is any risk of disclosure of this information relating to anyone who may still be alive. The rules around Data Protection legislation inform what we can open to the public and what we can have digitised and made available with our partners.

If there is information you wish to access which is held within our closed records, or if you encounter any other problems with the records, or if you have any further questions at all please let us know via the contact page <https://museumofthemind.org.uk/contact>

