

BETHLEM

MUSEUM OF THE MIND

Research Guide Two:

Patient Admission Records



Admission Records

Admission books were the precursor to patient indexes and patient lists. They were reference documents that told Hospital staff who was in the Hospital at a given moment. As such, they are usually the oldest and most complete set of patient records that have survived in any Hospital archive. However, they often don't provide very much information beyond confirming admission and discharge from the Hospital. Usually you will have to go to the casebooks to find out more about each patient.

Bethlem Admission records

Admission to Bethlem Hospital has sometimes been an obscure and opaque process. While Bethlem stood apart from the Parish-based system of welfare, from the time it came into the control of the City of London in 1557 the Governors sought to try to admit into the Hospital those who were beyond the help of the Parish authorities. They had a particular concern to relieve the burden placed on the Parish, but they were also concerned around issues of cost to the family and the risks the potential patients may pose to themselves.

Prospective patients or, more likely, those responsible for their welfare approached the hospital by means of a petition, which was then considered by the Board of Governors. While this petition was almost always a written document, relatively few have come down to us before 1815. Those that have are in our series BAP, which also collects the subsequent admission papers, and later the 'admission and correspondence files' which these papers become by the 1920s (see a listing at <https://archives.museumofthemind.org.uk/BAP.htm>).

Before the admission books begin there may be mention of individual petitioners in the Governor's Minutes (our ref BCB- <https://archives.museumofthemind.org.uk/BCB.htm> digitised and indexed on Find my Past, and part digitised on our collection website). Sometimes there is only a list of names of those asking for admittance, with a simple note declaring the motion has passed. The Governor's seemed to only consider the exceptional or the unusual, and other petitions seem not to have had or required very much of a hearing.

Our admission books for Bethlem begin in 1683 and are held under our reference ARA (<https://archives.museumofthemind.org.uk/ARA.htm>). The date is significant as Bethlem had only been in its new home, its second building in Moorfields (the famous 'palace' designed by Robert Hooke) since 1676, a move that significantly increased its capacity from around 70 to about 200. The admission books may reflect an attempt to manage a larger population of patients and possibly the greater demand brought on by the higher profile of the Hospital.

The admission books start with a name of the patient, an address and a date of admittance. There are then usually two names, the two people who will provide 'security' for the patient in the hospital. This means that they will cover any fees the hospital needs to treat the incoming patient- they are usually either representative of the parish authorities or are contacts of the family (often people able to provide patronage). These also had to be people the Hospital itself knew, or could be expected to be found by the Hospital relatively easily in 17th century*- London, and they are nearly always property holders in London. Occasionally a person is admitted by 'Warrant' from a prestigious body or institution. From 1765 the clerks keeping the books begin to add an abbreviation to the securities, usually to indicate if

they are 'Friends' (F) or 'Parish' (P), but also sometimes to show if they have come from the 'War Office' (WO) or the 'Office of Sick and Wounded Seamen' (S &W) often respectively Army pensioners from Chelsea Hospital or navy pensioners from Greenwich Hospital (which sometimes petitioned for the admission of patients itself and is abbreviated as 'GH' in the books). From 1800 naval patients are often admitted by the Transport Office ('TO' in the books), though all military admissions tail off around 1815.

There is then usually a date and a note of discharge from the hospital. In the earlier registers this note is usually either 'died' or 'discharged', though sometimes patients are described as 'discharged by order of the court [of Governors]', and their cause of death is sometimes mentioned. From the 1750s there start to be occasional comments in the discharge note, ranging from 'well' to 'sick and ill', sometimes even 'uncured' or 'incurable'. The books also start to note whether patients not recovered are eligible for entry into the Hospital's new long stay (or 'incurable') ward- 'fit' means they are suitable, 'not fit' means they are not. From the late 1700s the discharge section is on the next page with a series of the above outcomes as pro-forma options, also including a section on any absence of leave given or requested.

An individual may be mentioned in both the admission books and the Governor's Minute Books. There is also a list of patients admitted and discharged in every meeting recorded in the House Committee Minute Books (our ref HCM, starting in 1709 as the Bethlem Sub-Committee), which was the committee who dealt with the day to day business of the Hospital. Very occasionally there is a bit more detail within these books, especially in the case of something unusual happening.

The notation around the security eventually dies out in May 1853, as by this point nearly every patient's security is provided by friends and family. So-called 'pauper lunatics' were now being managed by the county asylum system, and Bethlem was moving toward a model of charitable private care that would continue until it came into the NHS in 1948. Potential patients from the War Office would soon be sent to Netley Hospital instead, and naval admissions drop off from 1815 onward, a trend that coincided with the development of naval hospitals at Great Yarmouth and Gosport that included specialist units for the treatment of mental health issues.

From ARA-23 onward (1853 onward), the admission books radically change format, and start to include diagnostic information and more information on the condition of the patient when they enter the hospital. This coincides with Dr William Charles Hood becoming medical superintendent and bringing new ideas and practices into the Hospital, in line with most of the other mental health facilities beginning to be established elsewhere in the country. The newly established Commissioners of Lunacy were starting to demand greater information and accuracy of the hospitals and asylums they inspected, and part of this may well have included a more informative version of the admission register.

There are some exceptions to the above, and some of the books in the ARA series are of a different format to the others. ARA-02 is the index book for ARA-01. ARA-07 is a different format of book showing leave of absences (possibly a register used to keep a note of which patients were expected to be in the hospital). ARA-08 is simply a list of 'curable' patients on a roll, and so is much shorter than the others. ARA-09 is almost like a casebook, and features much more diagnostic information, and in some ways is very similar to the sort of book produced in the series from ARA-23 onward.

The Admission registers continue until the early twentieth century, and after are succeeded by shorter indexes which record names and dates of admission and discharge. These are

initially books, but after the move to Monks Orchard in 1930 the Hospital starts using an index card system, probably inline with other Hospitals.

Other Bethlem Admissions

We also hold a separate run of 'Incurable' Patient registers under our reference ARB- <https://archives.museumofthemind.org.uk/ARB.htm> . The Incurable section of the Hospital was the long stay ward, and nearly every patient admitted there had been a patient within the Hospital and had been selected as being suitable for the ward ('Fit' in the language above). Therefore the details in these books are sparse, usually just recording the name and date of admission.

There are two criminal patient admission registers, which cover the period Bethlem fulfilled its function in providing to the state what we would call a high security hospital service, 1816 to 1863, held under our reference ARD- <https://archives.museumofthemind.org.uk/ARD.htm> . These do contain details of the patients criminal conviction, and some details of discharge, so are worth looking at in addition to the casebook entry.

From 1890 the Hospital accepted voluntary (private) patients- these were patients who had essentially self-admitted themselves, and who could therefore discharge themselves. We hold a series of Voluntary Boarder admission books (under ARC <https://archives.museumofthemind.org.uk/ARC.htm>) and a later series of admission and discharge books (under ADD, though these are closed under Data Protection).

Croydon Mental Hospital/Warlingham Park Hospital and The Maudsley Hospital admission records

Croydon Mental Hospital (which became Warlingham Park) has a series of index books under the reference QEA that begin in 1903. These books become a series of index cards in the 1960s. Unfortunately, as they cover a time period where we cannot be entirely certain that access to them may disclose sensitive personal information about someone who is still alive, they are closed to access (see the Data Protection section afterward). In this case there is no further information on the patients than might be found in the casebooks for the Hospital.

The Maudsley Hospital 's admission records are held on a series of card indexes held under our reference AIM that begin in 1923 (the date the Maudsley was opened to civilian admission, and the date most of our records begin). Unfortunately, as they cover a time period where we cannot be entirely certain that access to them may disclose sensitive personal information about someone who is still alive, they are closed to access (see the Data Protection section afterward). We do not hold complete case records of Maudsley patients, but we may have alternative records that we can search for a patient there.

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 casebooks 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 admission records, 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>

